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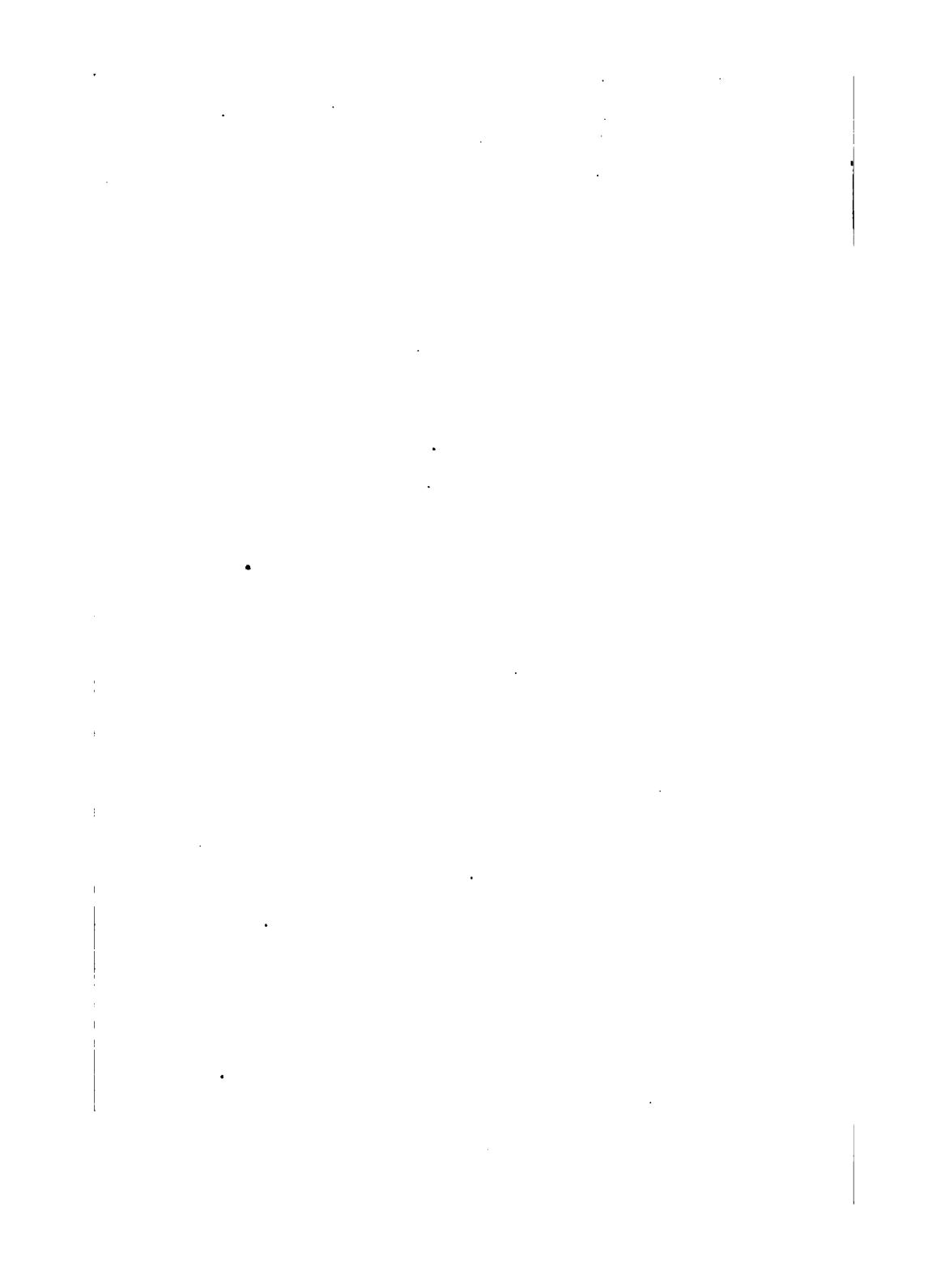
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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

IN PASTURES GREEN

ETC.



IN PASTURES GREEN

AND OTHER STORIES

BY CHARLES GIBBON

AUTHOR OF "QUEEN OF THE MEADOW," "IN HONOUR BOUND,"
"WHAT WILL THE WORLD SAY?" "IN LOVE AND WAR,"
"FOR THE KING," ETC.



London
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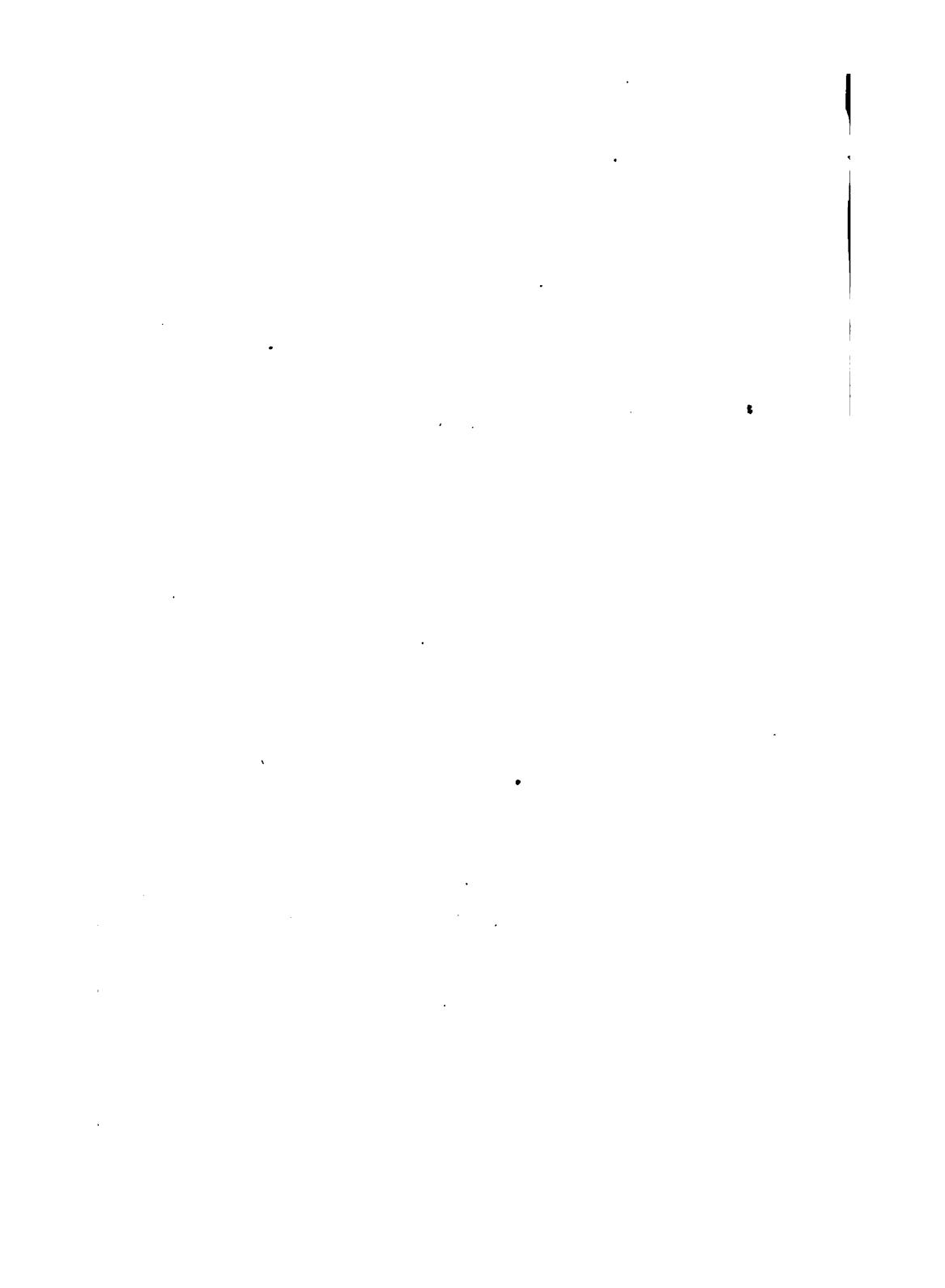
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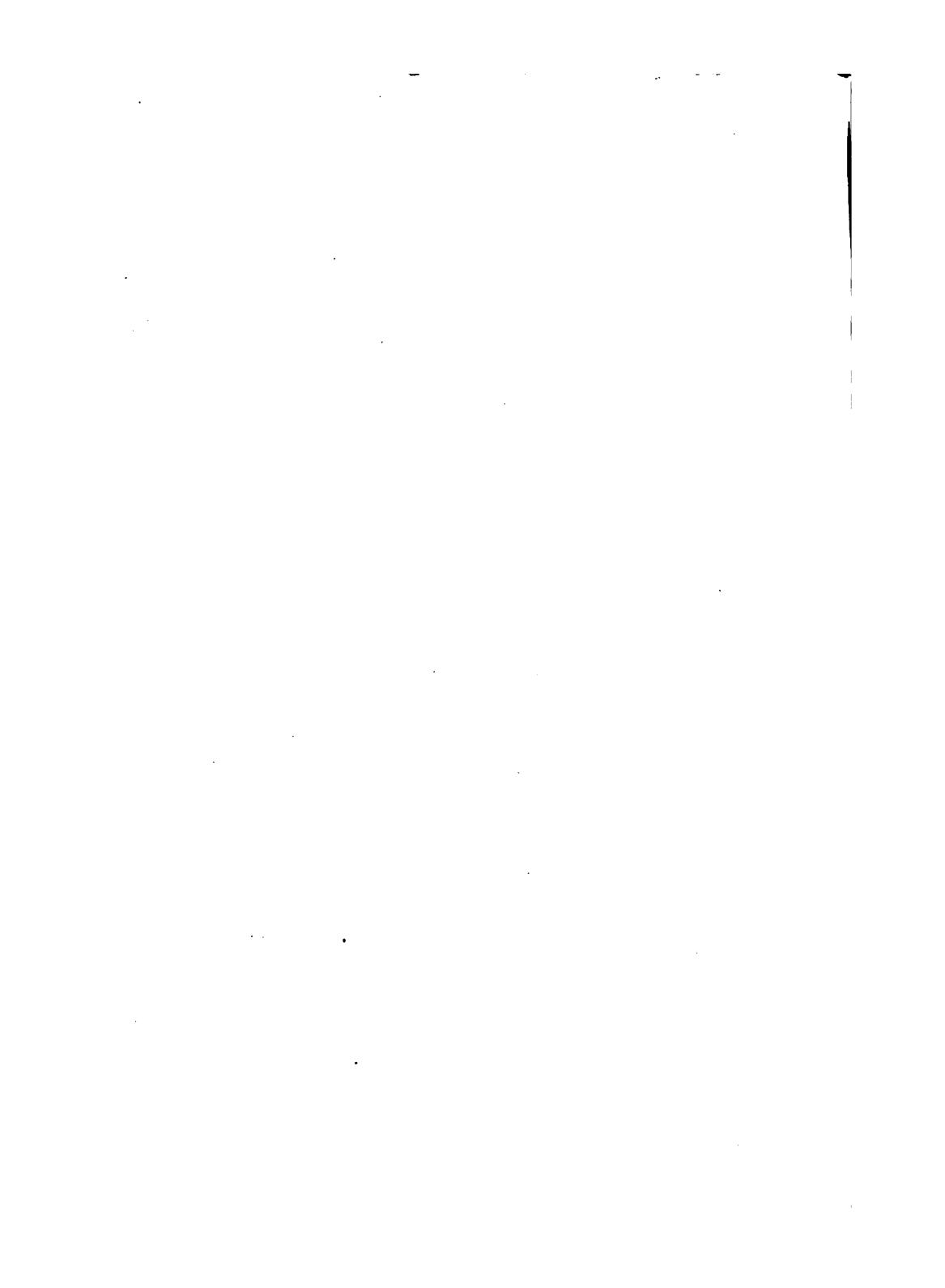
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IN PASTURES GREEN.

B



IN PASTURES GREEN.

I.

THE thick hedge which enclosed the quaint old parsonage in a square was brilliant with red berries. The hedge had been cunningly trained to form with honeysuckle an arch over the wicker-work gate which stood opposite the church. Milly Arnold was standing under the arch in a frame of red berries, and a very pretty picture she made : fair hair, blue eyes, soft rosy cheeks, and lips trembling with smiles of perfect happiness in mere life and the sunshine around her. She was waiting for the troop of young sisters and brothers who were to march under her control into the Vicar's pew.

As the people passed into the church they saluted Milly with kindly looks, and she answered with smiles and bows. The bell was ringing all the time, and its loud tongue seemed to render the surrounding quietude of the day all the more impressive. It was a day of sunshine, and the green meadows and the streams glistened with joy.

The children—eight of them—came out, and were more disposed to shout for sheer delight in their escape from the nurse who had been “tidying” them, than to behave with the decorum expected from the Vicar’s family. At sight of Milly the five girls became demure and the three boys made faces at each other, which performance they fancied was so cleverly done that nobody saw it. They were not at all afraid of their eldest sister, who had for seven years filled the place of their lost mother; but they knew how much it pained her when they behaved badly, and whilst their young

robust spirits craved for active expression in shouting, racing, and games of any sort, they made an effort to control their humours in her presence.

“Now, do try to walk quietly, and like ladies and gentlemen. Remember all the other children expect you to show them an example,” said Milly, with a pretended assumption of the authority of a school-mistress.

But she was smiling herself; the boys grinned; the girls looked serious, as if they really intended to behave like grown-up ladies. The youngest lady, Miss Totty, aged four, marched up to Milly and said—

“Where’s Misser Tyler?—he makes us quiet with sugarsticks.”

“Oh, naughty Totty! I thought you behaved well because you liked Mr. Tyler, and now I find it is because he gives you sweets.”

“Me like Tyler, and me like sugarsticks—don’t you?”

The question might have been an awkward one to answer, but Totty did not wait : she caught sight of a tall, handsome young fellow coming down the road, and she ran to meet him. She sprang into his arms without paying the slightest attention to his mother and father who accompanied him.

Eben Tyler had nothing awkward about him : his movements were prompt, resolute, and manly; his voice was clear and decisive; his step was firm, as with the sense of independence which characterized the man. But his black frock-coat, chiefly worn on Sundays, fitted him badly ; his hands were large and sunbrowned ; and his handsome honest face had not a shade of that sickly town-pallor which country ladies are too apt to regard as an element of interest.

Eben the elder and Dame Tyler passed into the church.

Eben the younger lifted Totty in his strong arms, heaved her up in the sunshine, caught her again with a pleasant laugh, and

kissed her. But his eyes glanced towards the wicker-gate, and a shadow (perhaps of the tree overhead) fell on his face.

Only it happened that when the shadow fell Milly was crossing the road to the church with a young man who was made up as well as Poole could make up a smart figure. The children followed Milly in a straggling line ; but when Eben came up to them they clustered round him and had a chorus of questions to ask, which he silenced with pleasant promises of a day's coursing for the boys and a picnic in Duntorpe Woods for the girls.

The bell stopped ; the rustle of skirts and the preliminary coughs had ceased ; the congregation had settled down to worship, and the service proceeded. Rays of sunlight streamed in through the dingy windows of the old church, and one mote beam broke on Eben's face, showing that the shadow was still there, subdued by a tinge of melancholy.

His mother, a woman of fifty, but fresh and handsome still and full of the energetic spirit of youth, glanced uneasily at her son and then at the Vicar's pew, where Milly sat at the head of the children. Eben's father—a ruddy-faced, white-haired, fat man of sixty odd—settled himself comfortably to indulge in his usual attentive snooze as soon as the sermon began.

Eben himself sat with eyes fixed steadily upon the altar, never glancing to right or to left, and never moving except when the service rendered movement necessary.

But behind Milly sat the young gentleman who had escorted her across the road, and he, very quietly and decorously, passed his Prayer-book or Bible to her, which she accepted in silence. Beside him sat his father, a tall, grave-looking gentleman, who was much gazed at by the congregation, for he was Sir Henry Lewis, the eminent barrister and Q.C., who had distinguished himself in many popular trials. He had

recently taken Elizabeth House, which stood on the outskirts of the village and had been originally the residence of the Lords of the Manor for generations. He was a handsome, intellectual-looking man, and the son—in spite of Poole—looked insignificant beside him.

The son, Montague Lewis (the Christian name had been chosen by his mother, as it belonged to her family), was also at the bar; but he had never practised, and gave no indication of a desire to practise. Sir Henry had given him one case to conduct, but he never gave him a second; he was too careful of his own reputation to endanger it by any misuse of patronage.

Montague was indifferent; he did not want to work so long as he had enough money to enjoy himself, and his mother took care that he should not want. He was idle and good-natured; he was extravagant, but he always kept within certain bounds; he lived in his Temple chambers, and had a

vague idea that some day he would take to work in earnest—not in the plodding way of his father, but in a grand way. He would go into Parliament, and obtain some appointment which would develop his genius and conduct him straight to the Woolsack.

Meanwhile he was at Elizabeth House, rusticating, as he said, after the weariness of town life, and he had become a great friend of the Vicar, whereby he also became a friend of the Vicar's daughter.

Service over, Milly, after shaking hands with the Tylers and hoping they were well, passed on to the house, accompanied by Montague Lewis.

Eben the younger had pressed her soft hand, looked into her clear eyes earnestly, and had seen there nothing but frankness, truth, and good-nature. But his head was bowed a little as he walked along towards the inn where they had left the waggonette.

A kindly voice whispered in his ear—

“Do not you be downcast, lad; she is

comely, but she is not for you. She was born for a town life and fine folk and fine fare. I have seen her like when I was in service in London. Though she did take you she'd be sick herself and make you sick too before a year was gone. You do not want to make her unhappy, now, do you?"

"No, mother; but she is a good girl."

"Who said she was anything else?"

"No one; and being what she is, if—"

"Nay, Eben—nay, no ifs, or you will ruin yourself. The young gentleman, Lewis, is her mate, and he means to have her."

"How do you know that?"

There was something quick and bitter in the tone which betrayed him in spite of himself; it was an unusual exhibition on his part, and the soft handsome face of the mother looked up to him sadly.

"It is worse with you than I thought, Eben, or you would have had eyes and seen—you would have had sense and known that Milly Arnold would be happier at the

head of a big house like the Elizabeth than as the hard-working wife of a farmer. She is a good lass, and maybe will not count these things now; but she would be sorry after, and make you sorry too."

Eben walked on, saying nothing till they reached the inn. Then—

" You'll drive, dad; I want to see somebody before I go home, so I'll walk."

Eben the elder nodded and grinned, winking with both eyes.

" All right, lad, I know; and if it was not Sunday I'd sing ye the old song, ' Fair the Maid and sad my Heart'" (he half chanted the words, as if the impulse to sing were too much for him; indeed, on market days he was the musical wonder of the hours after dinner at the inn); " but keep a stout heart: there are more lasses want you than you can do with."

He was a jovial old fellow, and proud in the remembrance of his successes in the bright days of wooing, as he had reason to

be, for the many admirable qualities of his wife were so many proofs of his wisdom and triumph. She had been the ballast which had carried him safely through many storms in life, and the old man was proud of her—proud also of himself in having won her. He thought if Eben had only the pluck of his dad he might win any lady in the land.

Eben saw the waggonette drive off, and then slowly walked out of the stable-yard and turned towards the vicarage.

He intended to see Milly, and yet he hesitated. That was unusual with him, for he was prompt of decision, and once decided he walked straight on to the end. But his mother's words made him pause, on Milly's account : if she would be happier at the big house than with him, why should he disturb her by seeking an explanation which must be painful to both, and useless ?

II.

MILLY was a girl of a very practical turn of mind, and the turn was due partly to nature and partly to the conditions under which she had lived since the death of her mother. Whilst she was still a child she had been obliged to calculate how far she could make three shillings do the work of five. She was in no respect mercenary: never a selfish thought entered into her calculations. But her father's income was small, and his family large; Milly had much to do and little to do it with; and so, having a practical nature, she had the habit of speculating upon the consequences of first steps. For instance, Totty required a new frock;

but that would involve a new hat, cape, and stockings; therefore the question became, in her mind, Could not the frock be turned, the hat renovated and trimmed with a bit of new ribbon? So with Tommy's knicker-bockers, and so with her own apparel, although—perhaps owing to her beauty—she always appeared to be the best dressed girl in the church. But she was plain and direct in her thoughts; sentiment never blinded her as to what was best to be done for those around her.

She was on her way this Sunday afternoon to visit an invalid, Widow Hurst, who required nourishment and kindly gossip to keep her alive. Milly had to cross the stile a little way below the church.

Eben Tyler was sitting on the stile swinging his legs, and his head was so bowed down that he did not observe her approach, and she could not recognize him until she was quite near. Then she exclaimed—

“Why, Mr. Tyler, not gone home? And you did not come to dine with us!”

He sprang up as if a cannon had exploded under him, and for a moment stood with a decidedly sheepish expression as that of a schoolboy caught playing truant. But he shook off his awkwardness, and with a hearty laugh at himself answered—

“I beg your pardon; I did not see you, although I was thinking about you. I wanted to see you, but I was too late for dinner, and have been waiting here till I could call without bothering you.”

“What a pity you did not come at once. You know how pleased papa is to see you, and how glad the children are when you come. There now, and you have had no dinner? How vexed you have made me!”

He became rather confused at this.

“I am very sorry—but it does not matter—I could not have eaten anything just now. Are you going far?”

“Only down to the cottages. I hope you are quite well?”

The question had been suggested by his manner, for without suspecting herself to be the cause, she saw that Eben was not speaking or acting like himself.

“Let me help you,” was his evasive reply.

He assisted her over the stile, and released her hand the moment she descended on the other side.

They walked down through the meadows side by side, near, and yet so far apart. They exchanged awkward commonplaces about the weather, the hedges, the cattle gazing stolidly at them; the sermon, the people in church—but he flew off from that subject—their eyes met, and she saw that he was disturbed, and he saw that she was calm, only wondering at his excitement.

They reached the little foot-bridge, with its single hand-rail, which crossed the shallow stream, or river as it was called locally. In wet seasons it gathered into a sufficiently powerful current to justify the name, and

transformed the neighbouring meadows into broad lakes.

He halted before she had stepped upon the narrow bridge.

“ Shall we cross abreast ? ” he asked.

“ Impossible !—one of us would tumble into the water ; and although it is not deep, the wetting would be uncomfortable. We must go in single file,” she answered, laughing at his odd question, and yet a little puzzled by his way of putting it.

She was about to pass on, but he stretched his arm before her, looking earnestly into her face at the same time.

“ I have a fancy. Suppose this were the bridge of life, narrow like this, and with maybe more danger of getting a ducking ; and suppose I said ‘ Milly, you have known me many years ; will you try the bridge abreast with me, will you trust me to keep you up, however narrow the way ? ’ What would you say ? ”

She understood. She had often thought

of somebody asking her to be his wife : she had thought of Eben doing it ; but this came in such an unexpected way that she blushed and trembled. In all her dreams of a proposal she had never speculated upon what her answer was to be ; and now she was put to it, so many considerations for others presented themselves—so many doubts, hopes, and fears contended with each other in her mind—that she was not quite sure whether she wished to say Yes or No.

He waited patiently, resting his arm on the hand-rail of the bridge and watching her downcast face. He was thinking of Montague Lewis ; she was thinking of her father, of the crowd of children at home, and of her brother at Cambridge. At length, looking him straight in the face, with an honest and resolute expression, under which lay much tenderness, she said frankly—

“I know what you mean, Eben, and

I thank you. If there were only myself to be considered in this matter my answer would be an easy one ; but I cannot say Yes or No until I can realize how my father and the children might be affected by my absence. I like you, Eben, more than anybody I know, outside our own house, and I believe my liking is strong enough to make me an honest wife to you if it might be ; but it is not strong enough to make me forget my father and his children. I want to tell you what I feel,—don't, please—don't think me unkind."

It was a pathetic appeal, for whilst she had been speaking there had been presented to her mind such a pretty picture of the wedding in the old church—of the bridesmaids in favours gay, of the group of eager well-wishers, of her father repeating the solemn service in tones of emotion that were made up of joy and regret ; and she saw this brawny, handsome fellow, standing by her side, devotion in his eyes and

sincerity in his earnest response. She felt it very hard to say No. She was not sure that she loved him with all the strength of her nature—indeed, she had a faint suspicion that if she had done so she never could have said No ; but she felt that he was a brave, honest man, who would have made her life happy, and she liked him, and wished that she might have said Yes.

He looked at her with a strange expression for a minute, and then wistfully—

“ You are very kind, Milly ; you are thinking of others ; place me amongst them, and remember it is the fate of your life and of mine that you are deciding, and then say Yes or No.”

It was difficult, and he was unintentionally cruel ; but his whole life seemed to depend upon her answer ; he was full of passionate love, and could not understand why anything should keep them apart. He was not poor ; he was offering

her comforts equal to any she possessed at present, and he was ready to do anything that might please her. He would not separate her from her family, or from the pensioners who looked to her—a great deal too much—for support. He was proposing to give her increased power and means of satisfying “the others” of whom she was thinking.

She understood all that, for she had a keen perception of the practical advantages of this arrangement or that. But she had a sense of justice, too, and she could not reconcile the duties of a wife with those which she owed to her family. But it was a hard struggle for the girl.

“I am sorry, Eben; but I must say No.”

He dropped her hand.

“We are to cross the bridge in single file,” he said; and there was a bitterness in his tone which he could not hide.

He was still thinking of young Lewis; her heart was aching, for she knew that he

was pained, and she would have been glad to spare him.

She crossed the bridge, and he followed; at the other side he held out his hand, saying, "Good-bye."

"Good-bye!"

And she walked on, and he stood still watching her as she passed on through the green meadows, the clear glistening water of the river dancing merrily along and seeming to mock his despair.

She would have liked to look back, but pride and sorrow prevented her. The parting had been so very unsatisfactory on both sides, yet she had tried to explain, and he knew all the conditions of her position. He would come again on market day, and then she would have a long talk with him, and compel him to understand that she would have gladly said Yes, although circumstances had forced her to say No. He would wait a little, and they would be very happy by-and-by. What a sad compound is that "By-and-by."

He stood by the river in the midst of green meadows, the hedgerows stretching out in all directions, sparkling and glowing with wild flowers ; the grey old church with its square clock tower looking down upon him. Peace was in the atmosphere ; the dreamy gaze of the cattle as they chewed the grass filled one with a sense of perfect repose, and the murmur of the water formed a monotonous cadence in harmony with the scene and its impressions.

In the midst of this pastoral quietude stood a man whose whole nature was on fire, whose heart was fierce with passion and hatred of the world. She had turned from him, and he thought that there was nothing for him but to die.

III.

EBEN the elder had lost his temper; a wicked pig had been working much damage in a potato-pit, and he had found it a troublesome business getting the animal back to the barn-yard. The sun had scorched the meadows, the earth was aglow with heat, old Eben perspired and panted as the pig dodged him to and fro, and he would have failed altogether if Susan Carter had not come to his aid. A maid with a fresh, kindly face and bright brown eyes, always full of sympathy; strong and healthful, she had from childhood taken delight in the hardest work of the farm; she could groom and harness a horse with the best

man about the place, and she could drive or ride with the cleverest expert.

“I don’t know what would become of us, Sue, without you,” gasped the old man; “nothing goes right unless you happen to be by. Where’s the missus?”

They were at the kitchen door, and Susan handed him a brown mug, around the sides of which were quaint figures, the top being white with the foam of good home-brewed ale.

“Darn that pig,” said old Eben, as if he were giving a toast.

He drank; recovered his breath and his humour; and when Susan gave him his pipe he turned a pail upside down, seated himself, and smoked contentedly. Susan was flitting out and in, between the dairy and the house, and the farmer watched her.

Dame Tyler looked out at the kitchen window, and he nodded significantly towards Susan.

“She’s got the right stuff in her, missus

—just like you. Managing is born in some women, and mismanaging is born in most. They can't help it, poor creatures; but when you do come across the managing one, catch her—that's what I say."

"I doubt Eben never thinks of her, although he knows what we would like," said the dame.

"You wait; he is working hard, and hard work is first-rate physic for love and the stomach. He hasn't been to church for six months, and that's a good sign—I mean, of course, under the circumstances. Mayhap he'll take a thought of Susan sooner than you bargain for. I'd have thought on her long ago."

Old Eben laughed as if quite sure that Eben the younger would follow in the ways of his father.

The gate at the foot of the road swung open, and Eben Tyler rode up to his father. The latter called out immediately—

"You have been giving the mare a rare

gallop, Eben ; give her a walk and a rub down afore you begin to speak. She's worth a clear hundred at least, and we can't afford to lose that in these hard times."

Eben nodded and obeyed. Susan stepped up to him when he began to rub the mare down.

"Leave her to me, Eben. Dad is dying to know all about the meeting, and you need not keep him waiting."

"Dad seems quiet enough with his pipe, and I am not going to let you have this work to do, Susan."

"But I like it," and she began on the instant to prove her words with the help of a wisp of straw.

"There's no use arguing with a woman ; so go on, if you like."

She was on one side of the mare, he on the other ; their wisps occasionally came in contact ; but there was no coquettling in the action. He seemed eager to finish the task ; she seemed to be entirely occupied

with her share of it, and only a very close observer would have seen the occasional flash of her eyes on his face. When she did look at him her expression was that of mild wonder and pity rather than of love. She knew of his disappointment, for he kept no secret from his mother, and the dame kept no secrets from Susan. There was no jealous rancour in her heart, only sorrow on his account, and a yearning to make his burden lighter anyhow and by any sacrifice of herself.

She knew what the dame's wishes were ; but Susan had long ago given up all hope that they could ever be realized. She only desired to see her cousin happy ; she knew how she would have striven to make him so, and sometimes she felt a queer little shiver as she imagined the day when he would bring a stranger to the farm as its mistress and everything would be changed.

Perhaps she would have to go away, and that would be hard, for she had never

known any other home. The place and its associations made all her world; Eben the elder and his wife had been like tender parents to her always; she loved them and the place, and the mere notion of going away was like the notion of death, so full of mysterious terror that she could not think of it at all.

Eben took the mare into the stable and went to his father.

"Well, what was the meeting like? Have the fools come to reason?"

"They had a large gathering at the inn, and some fellow who represented the Union led them by the nose. They are determined to hold out unless we come to their terms."

"Then let them hold out, darn them," cried the father, with dogged emphasis; "they have nothing to complain of about us. They grumble about their pay. Let them drop their perquisites and I'm willing to double their pay, for my part. They are

an ungrateful set of fools, and they'll find it out in the long run."

"They are only trying to do the best they can for themselves, dad——"

"But they ain't doing the best for themselves. Was there ever a man, woman, or child of them that ever wanted for anything on the farm? Was there ever one of them hungry and didn't get food?"

"I believe not; but they want to have as a right what was given as a favour, and I don't think they are altogether wrong."

"Are you going to join them?"

"Not yet," answered the son, with a smile at his father's obstinate refusal to admit one gleam of reason in the movement of the agricultural labourers to improve their position. "But meanwhile there is the wheat to cut and not a man to help in the work."

"We'll do it ourselves," said the old farmer, sturdily.

"We will have to do it. The new reap-

ing machine is to be in the field to-night, and I am to begin work in the morning."

"I'll be with you."

"And I will go too," said Susan; "we can manage it amongst us."

"You are a brave wench," said Eben the elder, admiringly; and he muttered something else to himself which was not complimentary to his son.

In the morning the two Ebens and Susan went to the field; the younger Eben was leading the horses which Susan had helped to harness, and the old man was walking with the girl.

A pale clear sky overhead, a fresh breeze blowing from the north and making the cheeks tingle and the heart leap with a sense of unspeakable gladness, the thrush and the lark making the clear air ring with their melody—the melody of pure joy in mere existence. There were youth and strength in the atmosphere, and the three

workers went to their task with good-will. Old Eben declared that the strike of the labourers had been a real blessing to the farmers.

"We were growing too fat and too lazy," he said, as he placed the sheaves which Susan had bound, "and that's what was the matter with us. Darn me, but I am growing young again, and begin to wonder why I've been so long out of the harvest field."

And he really did enjoy the labour which had been forced upon him.

Eben and Susan worked together: but he was now in advance, again a long way behind as he made the circle of the field, and they spoke little, save to make an occasional comment as he drove by her on the clean job the new machine was making of the wheat. But at noon the dame brought down the dinner, and as they all sat under the shade of a massive oak-tree Eben and Susan were side by side.

In the evening a good day's work had been done. The old man was tired and proud ; he was more determined than ever to defy the unionists ; and the dame, with anxious eyes, watched her son and Susan as they went to the stable with the horses.

" You are as strong, Susan, as you are good-hearted," said Eben the younger ; " what a wife you will be ! "

" We have to find the man yet," said Susan, blushing ; and then she hurried into the house.

IV.

A BRIGHT May morning, and the sun carried the perfume of lilac, wallflower, and sweetbriar into the vicarage through the wide-open windows. In the parlour the sun glared upon three yards of the carpet, and left the corners of the room in delightful shade, thanks to the small windows which the architect had provided for the old house. A hum of bird and insect life in the sweet drowsy atmosphere mingled with many curious noises proceeding from the nursery, which was also the school-room, for Milly was at this moment waiting upon her father, and the young people were left to themselves.

“ You are dreadfully nervous this morn-

ing, child," said Mr. Arnold, when she had arranged his bands; and then, as she stepped on to the patch of carpet, where the glare of sunlight fell upon her, he added, "and you look weary."

"Do I, papa? The children have been a little tiresome this morning, and insist upon going to see the wedding."

"Why not? Give them an hour's freedom, and they will return to their tasks with all the more good-will."

"But I must go with them," and there was something in her tone almost like suppressed alarm.

"Well, again, why not?" said the Vicar, with a pleasant smile. "You will some day have to go through the ceremony yourself, and most girls like to see how it is performed."

He was an easy, good-natured man, who had been spared most household cares by the diligence, first, of his wife, and then of his daughter. In his books and his parish

work he found infinite variety ; he was contented and unambitious. He appreciated sorrow where there was a definite cause for it, but he was slow to detect the varying shades of humour which indicate secret anxiety or pain. This morning, however, he felt that there was something wrong with Milly, and he was convinced of it when she said in a curiously low voice—

“Very well, we will go.”

“But do not go, child, if there is anything in the service which suggests unhappy thoughts. I am afraid you are thinking of young Lewis——”

“Oh, no, papa ! ” she answered quickly, and glad that she escaped through his mistake the necessity of paining him by telling the truth about the interview she had had with Eben Tyler in the meadows two years ago.

“I am glad of that,” Mr. Arnold proceeded, “because he would not have settled down into quiet domestic ways very readily,

and that would have been a trial for you. It is the very best thing that could have happened for him, his obtaining this appointment in India. He will practise there; no doubt he will be made a judge some day, and will come home a sober, sensible man, for he was not a bad young fellow in the main, and work will steady him."

"I hope so, papa; for I, too, thought he was not really such a wicked young man as people said."

"All the same, I am glad you did not care particularly about him. I would much rather have seen you the wife of young Tyler, for he is a steady-going, faithful lad, and will be a good husband. But there again, you see how happily Providence has arranged matters; Eben, in marrying his cousin, obtains the wife who is in every way best fitted for him. She is handsome, strong, has been brought up on the farm, knows all his ways, and takes interest in

all his pursuits. I think he is a fortunate young man."

"I must get ready now," she said quickly, and left the room.

There was a crowd of villagers in the church, for Eben Tyler was a favourite with them all, and the bell-ringers had of their own free will, without favour or reward, determined to ring a merry peal in honour of his marriage. They were all ready, and waiting eagerly for the signal to begin.

Eben performed his part with admirable calmness, and gave his responses clearly and firmly. Nobody would have suspected that he had ever thought of any girl save the tall and handsome woman by his side. She had a bright good-natured face, ruddy at all times with health, exercise, and humour; but redder than ever now with the blushes of joy and timidity at her novel position.

She, too, answered bravely, but in a soft

tone. Eben had been her hero ever since she had been brought an orphan to the farm, and kindly Dame Tyler and Eben the elder had received her with open arms. The dame looked on with entire contentment at the fulfilment of one of her most ardent wishes. She knew that Susan would be a good wife and would keep the old farm-house trim and neat, as she had done herself, when the time came for her to resign the management. She could not have trusted anybody else with the care of the place and of her son. Eben had threatened at one time to mar her plans, but he had become sensible at last. And how could he help it, being in sorrow at the rejection of his love by Milly, and therefore sensitive to the sympathy and affection of tender-eyed Susan ?

Old Eben had a broad grin on his face as he gave away the bride ; he was happy in the arrangement, for everything had fallen out just as he had predicted. He found

another proof of the correctness of his commonplace views of love affairs when Miss Arnold advanced to the bride, presented her with a pretty bouquet, kissed her, and wished her all happiness. Then she shook hands with Eben and congratulated him upon his good fortune in finding such a wife. He looked into her eyes with just the least bit of wistful remembrance of the Sunday afternoon in the meadows so long ago! Then he thanked her manfully and hoped they would see her often at the farm.

At that moment the joy-bells began their merry peal, and if there had been any confusion to hide on the part of the old lovers it was easily done in the bustle of leaving the church and getting into the carriages, whilst the bells rang loudly and gaily overhead and the children shouted as the newly married couple drove off amidst a shower of flowers.

"I told you it would be all right,"

chuckled old Eben to his wife as he took the reins ; “ why, losing a lover is like drawing a tooth—nasty to think about, but when it’s over we are mostly glad of it, and find we can eat as well as ever. Bless you, I lost many a tooth afore I squared matters with you, missus. I won’t say how many I’ve lost since.”

Milly, standing in the midst of the excited children, who were flinging the flowers as if they were snowballs, smiled and waved her handkerchief to the bride and bridegroom as they drove away. She received one last kindly look from Eben as the carriage wheeled round the corner, and then she knew that his face was turned to his wife.

“ We must go to our lessons now,” she said quietly, as the last carriage disappeared.

And she went to her lessons also. They were harder tasks than those of the children ; but she indulged in very few sentimental regrets or longings. She did not think that Eben had been false to her : he

had acted wisely and would be happy—she earnestly prayed that he would be happy. She had acted wisely also, and there would be happiness for her in the discharge of the duties which had fallen to her hands.

There was a shadow in her heart. There would come at times when she was alone a lingering thought of all that might have been if on a certain day she had said Yes instead of No; but it reflected no shade upon her face. The bright quiet smile was always there; the busy head and fingers were active as ever; and by-and-by the shadow, which had been at first like pain, became mellowed into a sad sweet memory, which she greeted with a smile.

She went to her lessons bravely, and performed them faithfully. Her father and the children were grateful for the happy home she made for them, and knew nothing of Milly's sorrow.

V.

A SUMMER day; the sun flashed upon the trees in their new dress, here showing a bright pale green, and there a darker hue; and through the openings of the trees were glimpses of cool green fields speckled with easy-minded cattle: the whole scene refreshing to the eye and to the soul.

A carriage was driving slowly along the white dusty road by the village green, where a donkey was solemnly regarding the movements of a noisy flock of geese. The red sign-board of the alehouse swung gently in the breeze.

In the carriage were two gentlemen: the one, a ruddy-faced white-haired man, who was the village doctor; the other, a jaun-

dice-faced, thin, dried-up looking man, who seemed to be much older than the doctor, although he was at least twenty years his junior. This was Montague Lewis, now a baronet, as his father had recently died. He had returned from India to live in happiness on the fortune his father had bequeathed to him, added to the fortune he had himself acquired at the Indian bar. But his chief happiness seemed to be confined to a series of consultations with physicians.

"What couple is this?" he asked, nodding indifferently towards two approaching figures; "the old gentleman appears to lean heavily enough on the lady's arm. What a capital figure she has! and a good face too. Is she a widow?—that old fellow can't be her husband."

The doctor laughed heartily at the jumble of comment and question which proceeded from his companion.

"That's right!—ha, ha!—I mean it's right that you should show interest in some-

thing else than your liver, and until now you have not done so since you came home."

"I can't stand jokes about my liver, doctor. Tell me who is the lady—what a calm face! She has never known what the worry and humbug of the world mean."

"Who can tell?" said the doctor, thoughtfully; "she certainly enjoys the world, and she makes other people enjoy it too. I have known the sound of her pleasant voice, and one of her quiet smiles, do more to relieve a patient in five minutes than all my skill and physic could do in as many weeks."

The doctor lifted his hat as the carriage drove past the lady and gentleman. Then he proceeded—

"Did you not recognize her?—she could not recognize you—it is Miss Arnold with her father. The poor old parson is laid on the shelf now, and the curate does all the work. All his children, except this one, have started off on their own account; the

daughters are married, two of the sons are in business, another is at sea, and the eldest, William, has got a fellowship at Cambridge and is taking high rank in scholarship."

"Dear me, and is that Milly Arnold? I remember her quite well—the most lovely girl I ever saw. How the deuce is it she never got married?"

"I don't know. I have often wondered where the eyes of our young men were, that she remained single; but it has been a blessing for her family that she did so. They could never have pulled through without her. She has seen them all comfortably settled in the world, and now she devotes herself entirely to the old man."

"What a monotonous life!"

"Upon my word I think she enjoys it; she seems to be always happy, and she has the knack of making everybody who comes near her happy too. She is the guide, philosopher, and friend of every man, woman, and child in Dunthorpe, and they

go as near to worshipping her as she will allow them."

"I don't think she would have remained long a maiden if you had been a widower, doctor," said Lewis, grinning at the doctor's enthusiasm.

"Faith, I would have made her an offer, at any rate," answered the doctor, gaily.

"I once thought of it myself?"

"And why didn't you do it?"

"Because I had not enough to keep myself; then came that appointment in India, and then—well, then came other distractions, and I forgot about her."

"More fool you."

"I must go and see her after luncheon."

The vicar sat in the garden under the shade of a huge lilac tree, his hands placidly clasped before him. Milly stood near him, her finger marking the place in the book from which she had been reading to him. She was talking to a burly man who was on the verge of becoming rather too fat to be gainly.

"You must come, Miss Arnold," said this big Eben Tyler, "for to-morrow is Milly's birthday, and the children all say they will have no fun unless you are there."

"I suppose I must go, then," she answered with a soft, pleased laugh.

"You really must. I shall come down for you about eleven o'clock, and the drive will do your father good. Do you not think so, Mr. Arnold?"

"Whatever Milly would like to do will please me," said the Vicar.

Sir Montague Lewis presented himself and interrupted the conversation.

"You do not recollect me, Miss Arnold; but your father will remember his old friend Sir Henry Lewis—I am his son."

"What!" exclaimed the Vicar, with mild surprise, "are you young Lewis?—how changed you are!"

"Fifteen years in India make a change in most men. You may call me old Lewis now."

They shook hands, and expressed pleasure in meeting again. Eben wondered at the transformation of the gay, handsome youth into the withered old man; and Lewis marvelled how he had managed to become so offensively fat. Milly was the only one of the party who appeared to retain the grace of youth; and her welcome was so genial that Lewis understood the doctor's enthusiasm about her. At the same time he began to have a glimmering idea that her life could not have been so monotonous after all; it had been full of pleasant duties, and she had been most happy in the work of helping others. Therefore she retained the fresh heart of youth.

But the passions of the old time barely ruffled the memory, and these three—Milly, Eben, and Lewis—were friends. So much so that the baronet, having heard of the birthday *fête* in honour of Miss Arnold's god-child—Eben's eldest daughter—begged to be permitted to join the party.

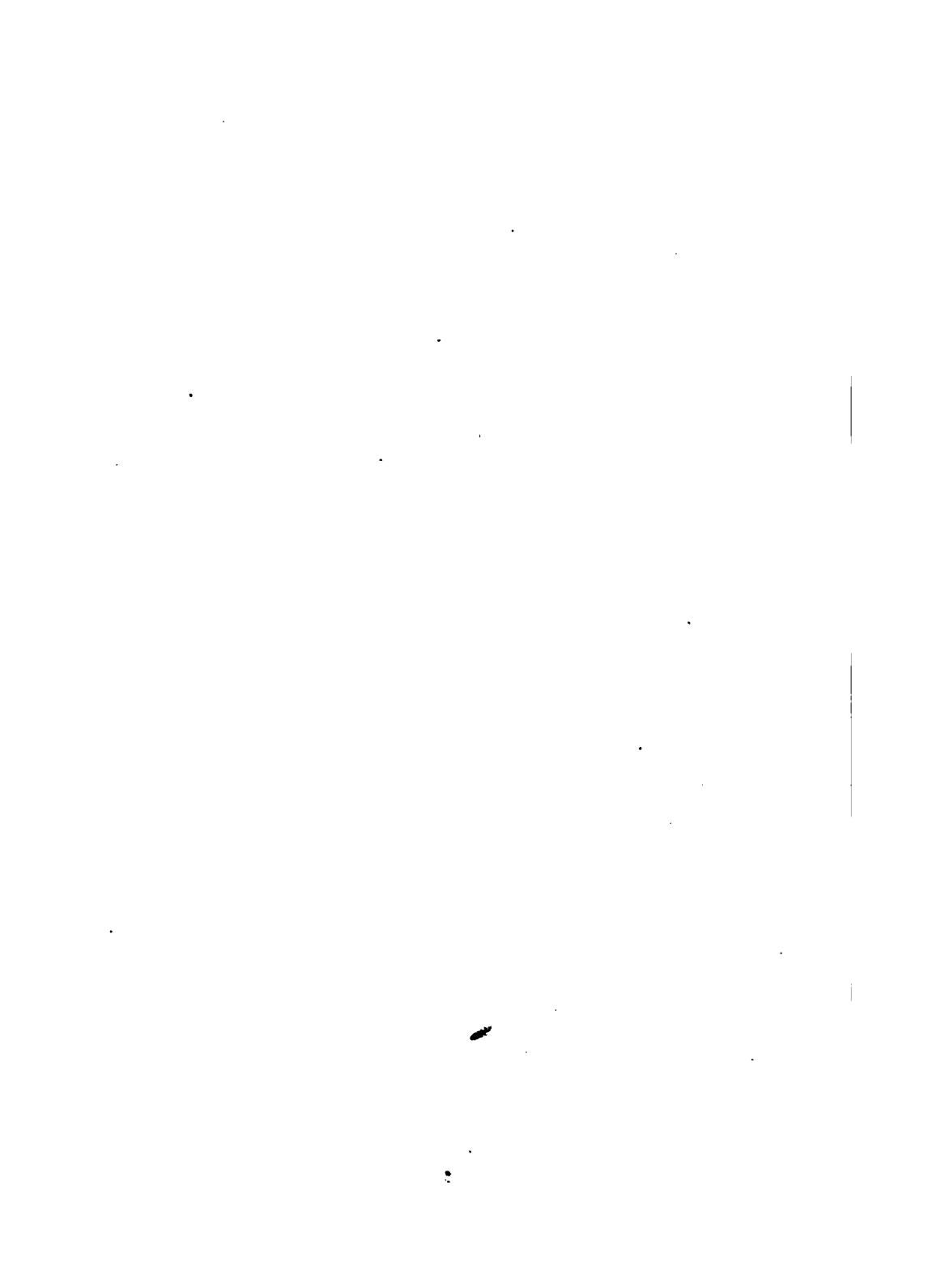
There were grand doings in the orchard at the farm on the following day. The trees were glowing with apple-blossoms and the grass was speckled with them. The white-haired Vicar, leaning on Eben's arm, watched the wild sports of the children, his daughter Milly being the youngest and merriest of them all, and yet contriving somehow to keep them within bounds.

"If I had not been such a withered old wretch, what a wife she would have made!" thought Lewis, as he observed Milly flitting to and fro; and then, with a short breath, he turned to Eben and the Vicar to continue his inquiries as to the chances of his election if he should offer himself as a candidate to represent the county in Parliament.

Sunshine, laughter, and the happiness of childhood; and Milly was the inspiration of it all. Her life had been one of noble devotion, and she was content. A game

at hide and seek, and Milly was caught under the apple trees by a troop of merry children. The boys shook the branches, and a shower of apple-blossoms fell upon her.

ALL A GREEN WILLOW.



ALL A GREEN WILLOW.

I.

SHE sat down carelessly at the piano, and, as if without thinking of what she was doing, her fingers touched the keys, bringing forth the pathetic air of the Jacobite song :

“ Hame, hame, hame, O, hame fain wad I be,
O, hame, hame, hame to my ain countree ! ”

and she contrived to throw more sadness into the sad air than John Aylmer had ever heard before.

Yet the sun was shining, and through the open French window of the Doctor’s little drawing-room you could see the light glowing upon the red, yellow, and fading green tints of the autumn foliage. Here, the

bright yellow of the chestnuts, blending with the transparent red of the beech ; and there, the berries on the rowan trees, holding their place whilst the leaves fell with every gust of wind, and with other leaves carpeted the garden paths.

She was looking, whilst she played, at the green lawn, then at the heavy-laden apple-trees, the many-coloured beeches, elms, and oaks, above which was a pale blue sky ; and she seemed to be dreaming, rather than playing for the pleasure of her companion or herself.

“ Why do you always play these melancholy airs, mostly ending in minors ? ” said John Aylmer, turning over the pages of a large album of photographs and paying very little attention to the portraits it contained.

She continued to play as she answered : “ I don’t know—do you not like them ? ”

“ No, they always end as if there were something else which ought to come, and

as it doesn't, one feels uncomfortable and dissatisfied."

"Is not that like our lives?" she said, still playing the sad air dreamily. "There are so many things which we fancy ought to come that do not: and so, we go on in periods of unfinished chords."

"Give it up," cried Aylmer, laughing at the droll problem which the girl had presented to him. "I don't see why we should play music without a comfortable finish, any more than I can understand why we should not make a satisfactory and harmonious finish to our lives. The notes are all on the instrument; why should we not strike them as we please?"

"Because we cannot always strike the notes which please us most. Have you ever known anybody who has been able to live the life he or she would have chosen if permitted to do so?"

She had wheeled round on the piano stool, and looked straight in his face as she put the question.

“Yes,” he answered boldly; “there’s Dr. Humphreys: I believe he will end his days harmoniously—contented with the life he has led, the work he has done, and followed to the grave by a long row of patients—mind, I say patients—who will remember him with gratitude. What do you say to that?”

She did not say anything, for she was serious and he was inclined to make fun of the whole question. She turned again to the piano, and with a very soft touch proceeded to play the plaintive air of “Hame, hame, hame,” as if to herself, and as if seeking some consolation from it for the absence of sympathy in her companion.

Aylmer closed the album, got up and stood behind her.

He was a handsome young fellow of about twenty-five, with sandy-coloured hair, the shadow of a moustache, and bright laughing eyes. He was only beginning life, and blessed with a sanguine disposition, he

scouted its shadows and believed in its sunshine.

She was about his own age, tall, graceful, and with a face that was beautiful, whilst the lines indicated firmness of character. The hair was dark, but the eyes were a soft blue-green when in repose; they appeared to become grey when she was moved by any strong emotion. Looking in her face with its strangely sad, yearning expression, one would feel that there were depths of affection in her nature which had not yet been reached, but that once sounded would never be calm again.

"Miss Richardson," he said, with his hands clasped tightly behind him, as if he feared that the temptation to clasp her in his arms would otherwise prove too great for him, "you are too deep in philosophy for me."

"I know nothing about philosophy. Why do you say that?"

"Because you are always asking me

riddles which I cannot solve to your satisfaction. After I have left you, I often think of such clever things I might have said; but they never turn up at the right moment, and so I know that you must think me an ass."

"Your ears are not long enough," she said, so quietly that even if he had been a man of a "huffy" nature he could scarcely have taken offence. Very likely she would not have spoken so to anyone else.

He only laughed and answered in kind, with a mock severity of politeness: "That is my misfortune, Miss Richardson, for it is better to be a dull ass than a stupid man."

"I do not think you are either."

"Thank you. Then, suppose you were asked to give me a character—say by your most intimate friend, and in strict confidence, of course—what would you say?"

"That is scarcely a fair question."

"It is fair and interesting, too, if you will answer without doing me the injustice of

thinking that I can't stand hearing myself abused."

"I am not so much your friend as to abuse you."

"Then, do not be so much of a mere acquaintance as to flatter me."

"Well, I should say, in strict confidence"—and her words seemed to keep time to the air she was playing—"that you were a man so hopeful as to be too trustful, so earnest as to be too jealous."

"Another conundrum!" exclaimed Aylmer, laughing at this description of his character, "and somewhat of a paradox besides. Now, how can I be trustful and jealous at the same time?"

"Wait," was the reply.

He would have sought further explanation, but he was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Humphreys. She was a little dark woman whose eyes seemed to be always gazing into futurity, never by any chance indicating a consciousness of the persons or

circumstances around her; yet she was always nervously anxious to do whatever might be most pleasing to others. She formed the most singular contrast to her husband—a big, robust, ruddy-faced, jovial man, who would contentedly get out of bed a dozen times of a night, whether the summons came from pauper or peer.

She had been called away to attend to some household duties, and thus the young people had been left alone. Now she appeared with the proposal that, as the Doctor had not yet returned, they should proceed to luncheon without him.

“Are you hungry, Miss Richardson?” said Aylmer, making a terrible descent into the commonplace question of appetite; “because, if not, I think we should give the Doctor another half-hour. I know the case, and, unless something extraordinary has happened, he cannot be detained longer than that.”

Miss Richardson of course assented to

the adjournment, and Aylmer continued merrily: "Then I propose that we all go out to the garden and take a tonic in the shape of one of those red-cheeked apples, and that it may taste the sweeter we will try to imagine that we are schoolboys and stealing it."

"Oh, fie, Mr. Aylmer," said Mrs. Humphreys; but she smiled at his boyish absurdity.

"I am afraid Mr. Aylmer's morals require correction," observed Miss Richardson, in her calm, grave way.

"Never mind, get your hats and come along," cried he.

He marshalled the ladies out through the French window, and when they were about to cross the lawn he became commonplace and practical; he warned them that the grass was damp, and that they would be much safer if they walked on the gravel path.

Miss Richardson lifted her dark eyebrows,

and her lips formed an unuttered “O!” of surprise.

“You have not lived much in the country, Mr. Aylmer.”

“No, and that is why I enjoy its beauties and avoid its dangers. To walk on damp grass in thin shoes is simply a deliberate way of catching cold, resulting probably in bronchitis, consumption, and an early grave.”

“Dear me! I wonder there is anybody alive in the country.”

“You forget the doctors.”

“I would not like to have you for my doctor.”

“And I should be sorry that I or anyone else had you for a patient.”

His eccentricities did not end in the warning about the damp grass. Instead of going straight to the apple-tree as he had proposed, he went to an old-fashioned rose-tree which almost covered the white walls of the house, and cut two roses. One he presented

to Mrs. Humphreys with becoming respect ; the other to Miss Richardson—but there was a subtle difference in the manner of the presentation, and she was conscious of it. There was a faint colour on her pale cheeks as her eyelids drooped and she pinned the rose on her breast. He was watching her, smiling and yet eager to note how she received the offering. When he saw its destination—"Now for the apples," he cried, with boyish glee.

He tried to reach them, but the branches were too high, and leaping towards them, he became hot and very red in the face. He was chagrined too at his failure.

"I used to be able to climb a tree," he said gaily ; and without considering how ridiculous he would appear, he clambered up the tree and seated himself on the first branch, much to the amusement of the ladies.

"Do come down," said Mrs. Humphreys, nervously ; "the branch will break."

“ There’s one for you, Mrs. Humphreys, and one for you—and one for me——”

“ What in heaven’s name are you doing, Aylmer, climbing a tree like a schoolboy, when you are wanted immediately at Mrs. Carson’s ? ”

The words were addressed to him in the loud clear voice of Dr. Humphreys, who had just returned and had followed the party into the garden.

Aylmer slid down the tree and with his handkerchief dusted the green mould from his knees.

“ We were waiting for you, Doctor, and it is rather hard to send me off to Carson’s without my lunch when it was on my plea that we waited half-an-hour for you.”

“ And the Carsons have been waiting an hour for you.”

“ Very well ; I’ll go to the Carsons.”

“ And we’ll go in to luncheon,” said the Doctor, with a malicious twinkle in his merry eyes, as he offered his arm to Miss Richardson.

She smiled demurely and glanced sideways at the disappointed hero of the apple-tree. He observed the smile, and it sent him off in hot haste to minister to his patient.

Dr. Humphreys chuckled much at some secret joke which he would not explain to anybody.

"What do you think of my young colleague?" he inquired as they walked towards the house.

"He seems to be very light-hearted," she answered calmly.

"Too light-hearted, I sometimes think; and yet he can be serious too, when occasion requires it. I have heard him talk with the gravity of a judge pronouncing sentence of death. But the impression never lasts long with him. As soon as he escapes from the surroundings which made him serious, he seems to forget them entirely."

"But it is a great blessing to have a light heart, Doctor."

"So it is, and I hope he will long retain his."

The Doctor was very merry at table, and whilst he ate heartily he expatiated on the miseries of the life of a medical man who never had a moment that he could call his own, by night or by day, and never was allowed time to take a proper meal.

"A message from Mrs. Doldrums, sir," said a servant, entering the room, "and would you please go at once."

"All right."

The servant disappeared; the Doctor quietly finished his meal, took ten minutes' nap, and then obeyed the summons of Mrs. Doldrums. He knew, however, that the lady's ailments were more imaginary than real, and therefore could afford to take his ease.

II.

WHAT was the mystery of this girl's life ? There was a mystery, John Aylmer felt sure : the pale face, the dreamy inquiring eyes, the self-possession, and the self-repression of the lady confirmed him in the idea. But what was it ?

That was the question he harped upon all the time he was riding along the green lanes to the farmstead where his patient lay. The question haunted and confused his mind even when he was in the presence of the invalid, and sensible of the responsibility which rested upon him. Whilst he was feeling the woman's pulse and examining her tongue, Margaret Richardson

was in his mind. He made severe efforts to recall himself to the duties he had to perform, and he succeeded so far that he made no blunder. The case was a simple one, although at times the weakness of the woman alarmed her husband and caused him to send post haste for the doctor. Aylmer's blithe manner and hopeful nature communicated hope to the patient, and so helped towards her recovery.

But as soon as he was on the road again, Margaret Richardson took full possession of his mind. "Madge," the Doctor always called her, and it was as Madge that Aylmer always thought of her. It was the prettiest name he knew, and it always conjured up the pale earnest face which had fascinated him.

At dinner he was more silent than usual, although he made palpable efforts to be agreeable. In the drawing-room he tried to sing, but he was husky and the higher notes were painfully flat. He excused

himself. Miss Richardson remarked that the voice frequently failed after driving about in an autumn evening. He retired to his room with the uncomfortable feeling that he had made a fool of himself when he had most desired to appear particularly bright.

He filled his pipe, and took up the last copy of the *Lancet*, but he read nothing : Madge was still the centre of his thoughts.

She had come there only a few days before, and her pale, grave face had attracted him at once. On the first evening of her arrival he had entered into a lively discussion with her on the merits of Comte's philosophy and the life of John Stuart Mill. It is always dangerous when a young and pretty woman and an impressionable man begin to discuss philosophy.

They became friends immediately, and philosophy soon gave place to lighter themes in their conversation — music, theatres,

novels. She played the piano with skill and feeling, and he, with a superficial knowledge of the notes, was able, by watching the music, to turn the leaves for her at the proper moment without requiring any sign. Utterly unconscious of what he was doing, he entered into a violent flirtation with her, which threatened to become something more—but the flirtation was all on one side. She was kindly, but always maintained her calm manner.

In two days he talked to her with a kind of chaffing earnestness about everything she did, as if he had been her intimate friend for years. He proposed wild excursions to the sights of the district which they were to make alone, in the teeth of all propriety, and she did not say "No." She had even accepted his invitation to accompany him one fine moonlight night when he had to drive five miles to see a patient. Of course the plea was that it would be such a splendid thing to watch the effect of the

moonlight amongst the trees as they drove through the Earl's Park. The Doctor was not at home, and Mrs. Humphreys was too feeble a person to make any strong objection to the plan, although she did not like it. Besides, Madge had once said to her that she felt quite competent to take care of herself.

Aylmer was very particular about the rugs, very anxious to see that she was sufficiently wrapped, and that her pretty feet should be kept warm. She accepted his attention as a matter of course only requiring the one word "thanks" in return. They started, and they were very merry on the way, and he at any rate saw very little of the beautiful moonlight effects amongst the trees in the Earl's Park. More than once he had been tempted to kiss her when she turned to him with those soft yearning eyes, as if wondering at some of his absurd sayings; but there was always that serious reserve in her manner which

he respected, in spite of his way of becoming familiar with everybody in half-an-hour to the extent of using the Christian name. Perhaps some thoughts of his own position, also, restrained him from making deliberate proposals.

She was the daughter of an old schoolmate and friend of Dr. Humphreys. Her father had died recently, leaving her a small annuity of fifty pounds a year. Her mother had died when Madge was only ten years old. Now she had come to stay at Dr. Humphreys' house until her future course should be decided upon. She had often lived with the Humphreys before, when their son Jack had been at home.

John Aylmer had obtained his degree of M.B. at the Edinburgh University, and for a year he had been acting as the assistant of Dr. Humphreys—the oldest established and principal medical man in Dunthorpe. Aylmer lived in the house, and his merry spirits soon made him a welcome addition

to the family. The jovial old Doctor found in him not only an active assistant but, almost, a substitute for the son who *should* have been with him. Except in the few quiet curtain hours allowed to the busy country practitioner, Dr. Humphreys never spoke of the absent son ; but his absence had made a deeper scar on the old man's heart than anyone who saw his ruddy, genial countenance would have imagined.

Aylmer was the son of a widow who had been a patient of Dr. Humphreys, and he was made welcome. The young man's bright and kindly nature not only won the affection of the Doctor and his wife, but obtained the esteem of the patients to such a degree that they never grumbled when the assistant appeared instead of the principal.

He was a robust, cheery fellow, who at once became an authority amongst the local cricket clubs ; and as soon as his play had been witnessed, each club com-

peted eagerly to secure him as a member. He was fond of a gun, and never lost an opportunity that was offered him to use one, no matter what the game might be. He often wished to get off to the jungles of India in order that he might feel what real sport was—sport in which there was danger to the sportsman as well as to his quarry. But he turned away from the thought of leaving England, because his mother would be left alone. She had struggled hard enough to make a small income meet the expenses of his education for the profession to which he was devoted with the enthusiasm that makes many men sacrifice their lives to their work.

When a child and standing by the death-bed of his father, watching the physician who was powerless to save the life so dear to his mother, he made up his mind to be a “doctor.” And the source of his inspiration was the hope of being able to do something to save life. That idea never left

him, although, as he grew up, his mirthfulness often blinded people to the noble impulse which had guided him in his choice of a profession.

He had been all along aware of the struggle his mother had made on his behalf, and there had been many a bitter day of regret that he had been the cause of so much sacrifice. But the thought quickened his energies. Then came the happy day on which he passed his examination with honour, and from that moment his whole ambition was to repay his mother for all that she had done by providing ease, and if possible luxury, for her declining days. Therefore he had resolved never to marry.

But now!—"Madge, Madge, Madge" was the burden of his thoughts, and his step became quicker when he walked, with that sweet face and the sad eyes haunting him.

Occasionally he would pull himself up, and speak as if he were addressing a lovesick friend.

"This is nonsense. You know you can't marry her—at any rate, you couldn't do so for a good many years, and she might get tired of waiting." (Even to himself he qualified the statement "you can't marry her.") "No, no, my lad, you must think about other things, and keep out of her way. It's all very well to make love in fun, but this is beginning to be love in earnest. I won't go near her to-day until dinner-time."

With which brave resolve he marched on as if strong ropes could not draw him from it. But he happened to turn his head towards the meadow, and he saw Miss Richardson walking slowly down the foot-path towards the river.

He instantly altered his own course, and followed her hastily. A lover's consistency!

"I am glad to see you out this splendid afternoon," he said as he approached.

There was a kind of startled expression in

her eyes, as if she had been caught doing something wrong.

"Oh, Mr. Aylmer! I thought you were at the other end of the village."

"So I was, but I have been called to the blacksmith's."

"Then, why don't you go?"

"I should like to walk as far as the river with you first."

"And I would rather you went to the blacksmith's first. Duty before pleasure, you know."

And she meant it: he saw that she did, and yet the words were spoken in such a quiet, sweet voice that he loved her all the more.

"Upon my word, Miss Richardson, you are a tyrant, and I suppose I must give in?"

"If you wish to please me—yes."

"That settles it—I'm off."

He retraced his steps hastily to the road, glancing back occasionally to watch the tall graceful figure walking slowly towards the

bridge. Presently he turned into the road, and the high hawthorn hedge hid her from his sight.

What a droll girl she was! And what could her solitary meditations be about?

III.

THE drawing-room was lit by the glow of a bright fire, and the last glimmer of the autumn twilight. Far away on the horizon there were still a few streaks of pale gold, bordered by fiery red ; hitherward, the sky was rapidly darkening.

Miss Richardson entered the room. She took up the album of photographs, opened it at a place which her fingers seemed to know by instinct. There was a portrait on each page ; she removed the one on the right, and put another in its place.

It was the portrait of a tall man, with somewhat soft features so far as they could be seen, for the face was almost covered

with bushy whiskers, beard, and moustache ; and he was dressed in a uniform. The portrait on the left was that of a pale-faced young fellow with only the shadow of hair on his upper lip. The large horse-shoe pin in his breast, and the white hat crossed by a riding whip, at once suggested a "horsey" man. The face of the portrait which Miss Richardson had just inserted indicated some suffering and a general gravity of character.

She left the album open on the little table, which she placed near the head of the couch. Next she lit the gas, took her work-basket, and resumed the knitting of a stocking which had been begun in the morning. She had no taste for fancy work : she liked to be doing something useful, and she was now knitting a pair of thick warm socks to be presented to the Doctor on the anniversary of his birthday, which was drawing near.

Dr. Humphreys got home earlier than usual this evening.

"All alone, Madge ?" he said, entering

the room, "and those busy fingers as busy as ever! What is this you are at now?—Socks, and for a man. Who is the lucky fellow?"

"You must not ask just now."

"I think I can guess."

"You would deprive me of the pleasure of giving my friend a surprise if you did."

"Let me whisper.—Aylmer?"

And his ruddy face was bent close to hers as he laughingly made this guess.

"Oh, no, you are quite wrong."

"Well, I won't try again. I am tired, and as it is still half-an-hour from dinner-time, I'll employ it wisely in taking a rest."

He went to the couch intending to lie down, but saw the open album; and he paused, his eyes fixed on the portrait of the young man with the horse-shoe pin. The cheery expression faded from his face, and he sat down, murmuring sorrowfully:

"Five years!"

He rested his elbows on the table and

his brow on his clasped hands. Madge's needles moved rapidly, but she did not look up. Presently he said :

“ You might play something, Madge.”

She stuck her needle into the sock, rolled up her wool, put away the work-basket, and went to the piano. She began her favourite air, “ Hame, hame, hame”—but she had only played a few bars when he stopped her.

“ Not that, Madge, not that—something merry, something to make one’s feet move and one’s heart light.”

She immediately began the blithesome old English air of “ Now, lasses and lads, take leave of your dads, and away to the maypole hie.” But the merry tune had no better effect upon him than the sad one, for in a few minutes he interrupted her again :

“ There is a new photograph here. Whose is it ?—Why, surely, it can’t be Jack ! ”

She came to his side.

“ Yes, that is Jack, only he has allowed the hair to grow all over his face.”

“ But they can’t have made him an officer already—I see, he must have got on to the medical staff. Well done, Jack ! ”

The Doctor rose, and agitatedly walked to the window, looked out on the darkness, and returned to the album.

“ He must have sent that to his mother, and the poor old wife takes this way of showing it to me—as if there were any reason to suppose I would not be glad to see it ! I wonder if he has written to her ? ”

He walked up and down, his plump hands clasped at his back, his head bowed.

Madge was relieved of one difficulty—that of explaining how the portrait came there. The other difficulty—how to answer the question, had Jack written?—she avoided.

"Are you sorry he went away?" she said softly.

"No, Madge, no; if I may judge from that photograph, the banishment has done him good, although it has caused us much more pain than I care to think about."

"Suppose he were to come in just now? —what would you say?"

The Doctor halted and lifted up his head: there was a sad firmness in his expression, although his lip trembled.

"I would say to him, Have you kept your promise this time, Jack? Have you lived an honourable life—have you worked?"

"And if he answered Yes,—would you believe him?"

The Doctor took off his glasses, wiped them, and when he had replaced them looked again at the new photograph.

"I don't know," he said slowly, and as if speaking to himself; "he deceived me so often, that I came at last to doubt

everything he told me. He never knew how hard it was for me to endure that feeling—he never knew how long I bore his extravagances before I allowed it to take possession of me."

She was silent; he resumed his march up and down the room, with head bowed.

"I never told you how it was he had to go away," the Doctor went on, and his husky voice showed that he was deeply agitated. "Whilst he was a student he spent more of his time at horse-races than at his studies. Again and again I had to pay debts for him amounting to sums which I could ill afford, and each time he pledged his word that he would never bet again. He passed his examination fairly well, as I was astonished to learn——

"But he was very clever," she said, quickly.

. "I suppose he must have been, or he would never have lived as he did and contrived to pass. I agreed that he should

act as my assistant, and implored him to remember the responsibilities he was entering upon, and to shun horse-races and betting as he would shun the devil. . . . He was not a bad lad at bottom, and there were tears in his eyes as he promised to obey me to the letter."

The Doctor paused, wiped his glasses carefully, and proceeded in a tone that became gradually firm and even stern, whilst she listened calmly, her eyes never moving from his face.

"Things went well enough for about a year, and on several occasions the lad's knowledge astonished and delighted me. We had a difficult case of a poor woman in the village: she required constant attention, and I trusted Jack to see her whenever I might be absent. One day I had to go to Chelmsford, not expecting to be many hours away, but I gave him special instructions about this case. An urgent message came from her husband,

begging that the doctor would come at once. Jack sent some medicine back, with the answer that he had to catch a train, but that his father would call as soon as he returned. It was late at night before I reached home; Jack had not been seen since he sent the medicine. I went to the poor woman. She died that night."

The Doctor wiped his glasses more vigorously than ever.

"But might she have recovered if—if——"

"If she had been attended to at once? I do not know. At any rate, the scandal went abroad that she had died in consequence of the doctor's neglect. The scandal became louder when it was known that the train Jack had been so anxious to catch was to take him to London so that he might start early the next morning for the Derby."

Her eyes drooped for the first time, and she murmured to herself, "Oh, Jack!"

"He came back two days after with a shamed face and repentant enough, for he had lost a large sum of money. He had received what they call the 'straight tip' from Sir Montague Lewis's trainer, and he had been secretly betting heavily on the event. His anxiety to learn the result overcame all prudence, all sense of duty, and all remembrance of his promise to me. The disgrace was too much for me, and it was impossible for him to remain here after such conduct. No one would trust him—even I could not. I was angry, perhaps too angry. I paid his debts, gave him fifty pounds, and told him to go, and I desired him neither to see me nor write to me until he had atoned for the past by working his way to some position of trust and respectability in his profession or anything else. He was sullen, as I thought then, and made no answer. He did not even say he was sorry for the disgrace he had brought upon me. Now I think his

silence was owing to remorse ; he felt that there was no excuse for his conduct, and he did not attempt to make one. He went away without speaking, without coming to say good-bye, although I waited for him here — God knows with what an aching heart. Then, when I knew that he had gone without giving me one sign of regret or repentance, I felt angry—indignant. I heard that he had enlisted under an assumed name, and that was all for five years. . . . Poor lad, poor lad ! he was not bad at the bottom.”

He went to the window, and now looked out upon utter darkness.

She drew a long breath ; there was sadness but there were no tears in her gentle eyes. She looked down at the photographs, and did not speak. Glancing at him, without raising her head, she could make out that the old man’s broad shoulders were moving strangely.

By-and-by he turned towards her again.

His face was not so ruddy as usual, neither was his voice so firm.

“Do you know, Madge,” he said, with an attempt to smile so pitiful that it made her breath come quick—“Do you know, I sometimes think that we are often harshest to those whom we love most.”

“Perhaps it is because we expect so much more from them than from others.”

“Maybe,” he answered weariedly. Then he gave himself a shake, like a Newfoundland dog who has just stepped out of the water, and he spoke in something like his ordinary tone. “We won’t talk any more about this; you understand it all now, and talking about it only puts me out. In future let us be silent on this subject. Close the book.”

She did so, and his face seemed to brighten as if the unhappy thoughts were shut up with the photographs.

“I wonder if dinner is ready—I’m hungry.”

IV.

JOHN AYLMER was bold in his advances—in fun ; but he was shy to a degree when in earnest. The considerations of his position which had controlled him at first had imperceptibly disappeared, and all his future hopes seemed to circle round the sun-hope of winning Madge. But for the life of him he could not tell her his real feelings. That graceful calmness, that sweet smile which seemed always to welcome him, and seemed always friendly, still seemed to keep him at a long distance from her.

Once he had solemnly taken her hand in his, and, holding it up as if he were disposed to kiss it, he said,

"What a pretty little hand you have got."

"Yes, sixes fit me easily."

She always brought him back to the earth with some commonplace like that, just when he thought courage and opportunity to speak had been granted to him.

Some outlet for his feelings was necessary; so, as he tramped along the bypaths of the road, crushing out the pleasant odour of the autumn leaves at every step, he was constantly writing imaginary letters to her.

"May I tell you, Madge (that is the name by which I always think of you—may I use it?); may I tell you, Madge, how you have taken possession of me—heart and soul? May I tell you how amidst all our chaffing I am painfully in earnest? I love you. It is wrong. I have duties to perform; I am poor, and cannot offer you a home at once. It is wrong to ask you to wait, but, oh Madge, my darling!—

"Well, I don't want to go into rhapsodies—if I can help it; but the thought of your hand resting in mine makes me feel as strong as a giant—ay, two giants—and ready to meet any mortal difficulty that might turn up. The thought of losing you, of you going away to somebody else, makes me feel as weak and hopeless as that poor old man in the lower village who is in the last stage of typhoid fever. And ——"

But he didn't like that professional simile, and on consideration he began another letter as he tramped onward through the green fields and up to the farm where he had to see a patient.

Dr. Humphreys saw quite well what was going on in the mind of his young colleague. He was sorry to see him take the affair so much to heart, as was apparent to friendly eyes, in spite of his show of mirth. Mrs. Humphreys was nervous, and did not like the affair. Then the Doctor laughed and said:

“ Why, wifie, we married on nothing a year, and it didn’t turn out such a miserable business after all.”

Then Mrs. Humphreys looked straight into the eyes of a human being, for once in a way, and smiling, rested her frail faded little hand in his large palm.

“ Very well, we’ll leave them to settle it between themselves,” said the Doctor cheerily.

At the foot of the garden there was a substantially built summer-house, in which one was secure against rain, and a large willow which shadowed the entrance afforded considerable protection against wind and sun. The interior was large enough to hold ten or a dozen people, and besides the usual seats at the sides, there was a little table and a wire-work rocking-chair. Here, in his few hours of leisure, the Doctor was fond of sitting rocking himself slowly, while he read the *Lancet* or some new medical work.

He used to say that he was as quiet here as if he had "a lodge in some vast wilderness," for which he had often pretended to sigh.

Madge, too, had discovered that when the sun was shining, the hut was a very pleasant place indeed in which either to work or to read, even in autumn. She had a fancy for being alone at times, and she found that here she was rarely disturbed. She was not afraid of cold, but she had the practical turn of mind which induced her to take plenty of warm wraps with her when she went out to the hut on these cold days.

There John Aylmer found her at noon on the day after her conversation with the Doctor. The sky was aglow with heat, and misty exhalations were slowly rising from the earth. The trees were beginning to look bare, and brown was the predominant colour of the foliage around ; but the bower was covered with ivy, and it presented to the eye a fresh green, sparkling in the sun-light.

She was imitating the Doctor as far as rocking herself to and fro in the wirework chair might be considered an imitation ; but the book she had taken out to read lay on her lap unheeded. Dreaming, dreaming, and she saw nothing of the fading leaves and the brilliant colours they displayed all around her, glancing and flashing with strange beauty as the rays of the sun fell upon them.

For a moment she did not see Aylmer as he stood in the doorway.

“ May I come in ? ” he said, laughing at her abstraction.

She started, and hastily snatched up her book as if she meant to pretend that she had been reading, but she met his merry eyes, and she laughed with him.

“ Certainly, come in, Mr. Aylmer. I was away sweeping cobwebs off the moon—sun, I ought to say, perhaps, at this time of day.”

“ Day-dreams ; and what sort of dreams were they, and what about ? ”

"Very pleasant, and about—nothing."

"Do you often dream about nothing?"

"Very often," she answered, with that quiet smile which made her appear to Aylmer angelic, and yet kept him so far away from her.

"I dream, too, but then it is always about something."

He was still standing in the doorway, and half unconsciously he caught one of the willow branches and broke it off.

"That must be a great satisfaction."

"What?"

"To dream about something. My dreams are all chaos."

He glanced at her wistfully and seated himself on the form nearest to the chair, twirling the willow branch between his fingers.

"I have had such a strange dream lately," he said nervously; "it was just like a story —only, it did not finish before I awakened. Shall I tell you?"

“If you please.”

He bent towards her and timidly placed his hand upon hers—the one she was resting on the arm of the chair.

She did not withdraw the hand, and he was pleased.

“Well, once upon a time——”

“A very original beginning!” she exclaimed, laughing, and, under pretence of clapping her hands, withdrawing the one he held.

“But you know a story is no good unless it begins according to the regulations of style and form.”

“Well?”

“Well, once upon a time there was a poor young man. But he was an ambitious young man, and he wanted to make his way in the world. He was always repeating to himself the axiom—‘What man has done, man may do,’ and he wanted to do a great deal. He had a mother who had helped him forward by much self-sacrifice,

and he wanted to repay her. So he resolved that he would never, never marry under any temptation. But it came to pass that he saw a beautiful princess, and his heart went away from him, and he was no longer master of himself."

He paused: there was a quiet earnestness in his voice and manner, which became more and more intense as he proceeded.

She rocked herself gently in the chair, a smiling expression as of wonder and amusement on her face, her eyes looking straight into his.

"Well, when he saw the princess?"

"Ah, then he did not know what to do. He reasoned with himself; he told himself again and again that it was madness to imagine that the beautiful princess would ever cast a look of favour upon him; he recalled the serious duties he had to perform, the debt he owed to his mother, and he sternly resolved to escape from this folly. But whenever he saw the lady, reason for-

sook him, and his love made him blind to all consequences. Was it not a mad love?"

"Decidedly: why did not his friends send him to an asylum?"

"He was very cunning—or thought he was, and his friends did not know of his madness. But he did think of putting himself into an asylum, or of running away on board a man of war, just to escape her fascination—fascination which altered the whole course of his life."

"Was she so very terrible?"

Madge felt her heart beating quick, for she began to understand, although she pretended still to believe that he was only telling a story.

"She was very terrible to him, because of his fear that he could never win her. Night and day her eyes—strange, quiet, tender eyes—her face, her form haunted him. He was often near her, always yearning to tell her how he loved her—and yet he dared not."

Madge gradually ceased rocking the chair, and her smile was slowly giving place to a look of anxiety. She would have been glad to escape if she could have done so without causing him pain.

He suddenly altered his tone from that of earnestness to one of heroic burlesque. But she saw quite clearly that the burlesque was only a very transparent mask.

“One day he found her alone—as it might be here, in this arbour. She was very kind and gracious—just like you—and he could restrain himself no longer. He felt that he must speak or go raving mad. So, he dropped down on his knees, just like this—very ridiculous, isn’t it?—and he cried, ‘**MADGE, I LOVE YOU!**’”

She would have sprung back from him, but he had clasped her round the waist and held her in such a passionate grasp that she could not move.

“**Mr. Aylmer!**” she gasped, in a degree

of terror for which the circumstances did not seem to account.

He released her instantly, and rose, at the same time picking up the willow branch which had fallen on the floor.

She, too, rose, but quietly, although there was a wild, startled expression in her eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said huskily, and somewhat incoherently. "I did not know—I thought—or rather, I hoped—but that's no matter now. I beg your pardon."

She was trembling as if with sudden cold; her book had dropped upon the floor. He stooped, and placed it on the table. She seemed to be suffering pain as great as that of Aylmer.

"Forgive me," she said in a low voice, her hands resting on, or rather clutching, the back of the chair, her eyelids with their long dark lashes screening her eyes.

"Forgive you!" he said sadly: "I cannot forgive you for being beautiful; I cannot forgive you for being the woman who would

have made my life complete and happy. There is no forgiveness needed for that. By-and-by I shall think of you as a sweet vision which inspired me with new strength and new courage to dare the worst that I may encounter in the world. Just now! —Oh, Madge, let me tell you what you have been and are to me.”

“ No, no ! ” she cried excitedly ; “ do not speak any more, do not tell me any more. Forgive me, forgive me if I have done anything to mislead you—I am married, and my husband lives.”

The ghastly whiteness of his face showed that the pulsation of his heart had stopped for an instant at that confession which killed all hope. He dropped the willow branch on the floor; he bowed in silence, and walked hurriedly away.

V.

MARRIED! . . . He did not care to inquire to whom? or when, or where? The one fact was enough for him; and a kind of superstitious horror seized him at the idea that he had fallen headlong in love with the wife of another man! But how was he to know?

He did not blame her. No doubt she had good reasons for concealing her position; and looking back on all her conduct towards him, he at once acquitted her of anything like coquetry. She had never led him on; she had never played any of those tricks which, in mere fun, women are apt to play in order to enjoy a triumph over the man

they have attracted. On the contrary, she had been always severely practical ; and he was able to see now the many kindly ways in which she had endeavoured to warn him off, and save him from this pain.

And he had thought it was just her way, and that when she knew how much he loved her she would pity him, and, by-and-by, come to love him in return. How he had dreamed about that—how he had hoped !

And now !——

Miss Richardson did not appear at dinner, the excuse being a severe attack of cold and headache.

There was silence at the meal, except when the Doctor, in the course of carving, told one of his old jokes, which he enjoyed more thoroughly than anybody, and always laughed at as heartily as if he had never heard it before.

Mrs. Humphreys left the table as soon as possible in order to see what she could

do for Miss Richardson. The Doctor was eating apple and cheese at the time. Aylmer was cracking a walnut with singular deliberation. In the midst of the operation he suddenly spoke.

"I am going to give you a surprise, Doctor."

"Don't spoil my digestion, whatever you do," was the laughing exclamation.

"I hope not. You know that I have always been anxious to see a bit of the world before I settle down to steady practice."

"Of course, of course—we all have that notion at your age."

"Well, I have an offer from the P. and O. Company, and I leave here to-morrow."

The Doctor did look as if this news would interfere with his digestion.

"To-morrow! nonsense: you can't."

"I must!"

The Doctor peeled his second apple in silence. Then: "I don't understand this

sudden move. Been quarrelling with Madge—eh ? ”

“ Oh no ? I shall never quarrel with her.”

His unusually grave face and manner puzzled the kindly Doctor.

“ It’s lucky we are not busy just now, or this would have put me about.”

“ I would not have gone so suddenly if you had been busy. But I want to spend a few days with my mother, and I lose the appointment if I don’t start in a fortnight.”

“ At any rate, you’ll stay to drink my health to-morrow night at dinner, and you can take the late train up. Come, now, there’s a good fellow,” he added, seeing Aylmer hesitate, “ don’t deny me that favour.”

“ I cannot, when you ask me that way.”

“ That’s right. We’ll square accounts in the morning ; dinner shall be early, so that we can have as long an evening as possible,

and I'll ask Brown to take a turn for me if I happen to be wanted. But is there nothing about Madge in this?"

Again hesitation, and then reluctantly :—“Yes.”

“I thought so ; but I see you don't care to explain, and I won't press you, although I suppose the whole thing is, that she has refused you.”

Aylmer nodded.

“I am sorry, for she will make a capital wife to somebody, and I wish you had got her.”

Aylmer said nothing ; he had a secret to keep ; but he wondered in a dreamy way what the Doctor would say when he, too, learned that Madge was married. He packed his portmanteau that night, and before breakfast on the following morning he had ordered a trap to be at the door in time to enable him to catch the 9 p.m. train for London.

The party in honour of the Doctor's

birthday was to consist simply of the family. Madge was late ; Mrs. Humphreys was very nervous. The drawing-room was cold, and the Doctor proposed that they should at once go into the dining-room, where there was a blazing fire. There were only four of the party, but after being a few minutes in the room, the Doctor observed that the table had been laid for five.

“ Why, who is our guest ? ” he said. “ I thought there was to be nobody here but ourselves ! ”

Mrs. Humphreys fidgeted, looked confused, and was relieved by the opening of the door, and the entrance of Madge, accompanied by the fine-looking fellow the Doctor had seen in the photograph album.

“ It’s Jack—my son ! ”

And the old man took him in his arms, with a low muttered—“ Thank God ! ”

“ A birthday present,” said Madge, quietly, “ and we ask your forgiveness.”

"For what?"

"For disobeying you and pleasing ourselves," said Jack, calmly, "she is my wife."

The Doctor was staggered at this revelation. Aylmer stood by quite calm, but rather pale. Presently the Doctor said with an emotional gulp:—"God bless you both!—I am glad you have come back, lad."

Then they all sat down to dinner: the story of Jack's career was told, and the details repeated often. He had not gone away as a soldier, but as one of the medical staff appointed to attend the army in Abyssinia; he had earned distinction in the campaign, and he had won the right to come back, having fulfilled his father's angry demand that he should do something to prove himself capable of work. But before going he had induced Madge to become his wife. They both asked forgiveness, and it was given.

Jack was the hero of the evening; Aylmer was very silent, although he tried to appear cheerful. When he spoke, however, they all noticed a curious hesitation in his speech, as if he were trying to keep down something that was rising in his throat. He gave Jack a hearty grasp of the hand, which meant plainly, "You are a lucky fellow." He seldom looked at Madge, and when he did speak to her it was with an effort to appear cheerful which was painfully evident to those who understood the position of the two.

The Doctor was happy beyond measure, and his wife was proportionately happy. The reconciliation was complete, and she felt that now her home would be glad indeed.

After dinner Madge was asked to sing, and she chose the old song, "Hame, hame, hame;" but there was a lightness in her touch on the keys of the piano as if the final couplet were uppermost in her thoughts:

" Yet the sun, through the mirk, seems to promise to
me,
I'll shine on ye yet in your ain countree."

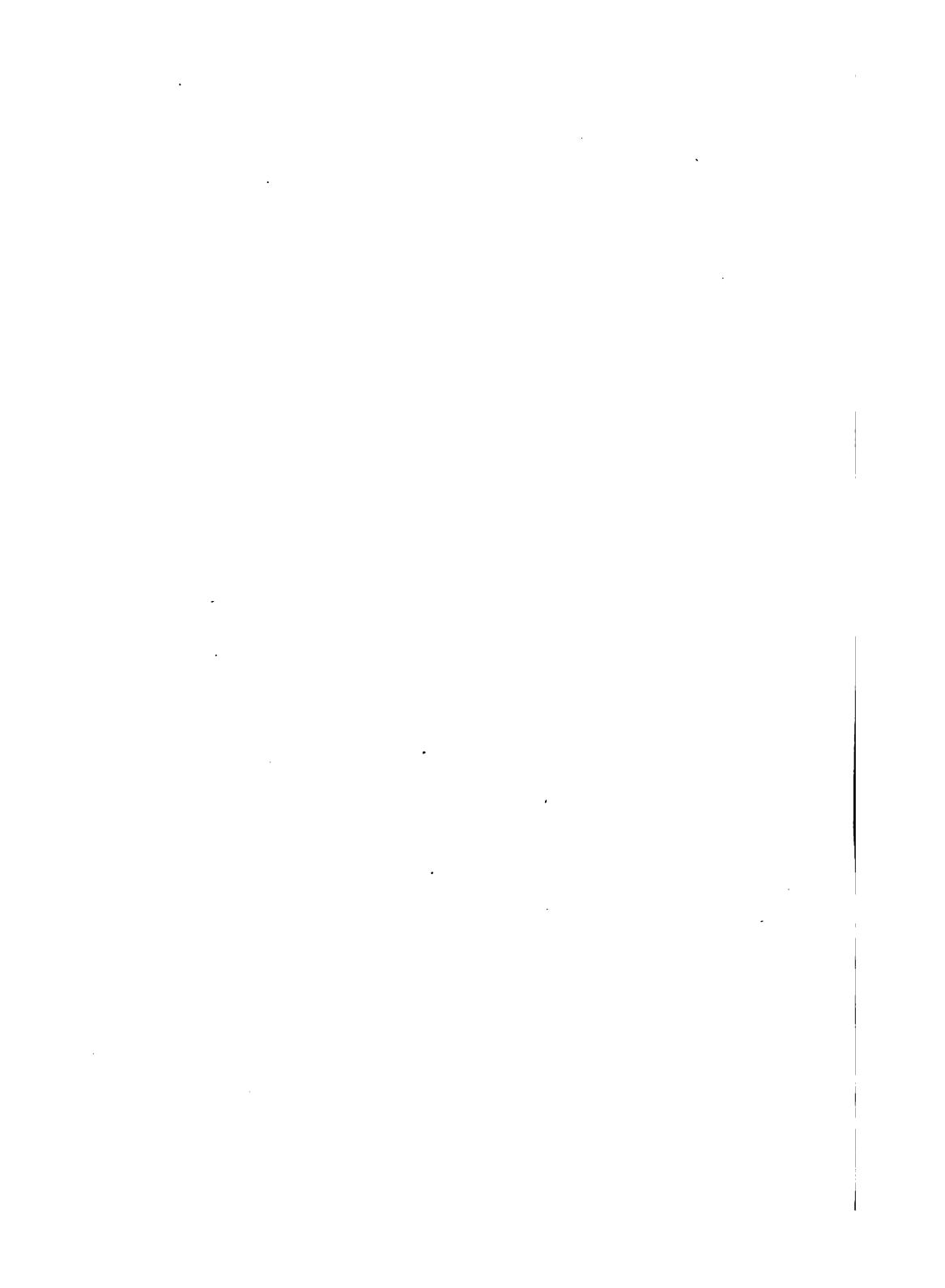
And when the last lingering notes of the pathetic but now pleasant air were hushed, Aylmer hastily said "Good-bye" to all. He took her hand very gently in both his own, and there was a fervent "God bless you" in his eyes, although he could not speak. In her expression there were respect, regret, and gratitude.

They all stood at the window to watch him as he mounted the gig; he waved his hand, and again said faintly, "Good-bye."

As he was driven to the station he realized the meaning of what he had called Madge's conundrum:—

" There are so many things which we fancy ought to come that do not: and so, we go on in periods of unfinished chords."

CANCELLED ENGAGEMENTS.



CANCELLED ENGAGEMENTS.

I.

PERHAPS the wine had something to do with it ; perhaps the heat of the rooms ; perhaps the soft flow of the music, as it murmured along in gentle cadence, now of waltz, and anon of quadrille. Whatever the reason, Julia Harmond had never before appeared to me so beautiful as at this soirée of my friends the Mortlakes. As I said, the rooms were warm, and the doors leading into the conservatory were thrown open. The night was beautiful, the moon making it clear almost as daylight. Julia took my arm, and we passed into the conservatory ; thence to the garden. She was very pretty —beautiful even ; with eyes and face that

were always laughing, always happy. More, she was the daughter of an esteemed acquaintance. Why was it all this occurred to me on that night? I do not know; neither do I know of what we talked, she and I, further than that our conversation was deeply interesting, and that when we parted I had formally proposed, and had been formally accepted.

When I was alone, I was stupefied by the thought of the recklessness with which I had entered upon such a serious engagement. It was so strange, that all that had passed was like a dream. I half persuaded myself that it was a dream. I had been staying at Boulogne only a few weeks, in order to recover some of the strength I had lost by much work and no play. I was not acquainted with any one, and as I did not possess the happy knack of picking up acquaintances anywhere, I led a somewhat solitary life until the arrival of the Mort-lakes, and with them Julia Harmond. Then

I was shaken out of my dreamy dozing habits, and hurried into a round of dinners and soirées till the evening above alluded to.

On the following morning I visited Julia, who presented me to Mr. and Mrs. Mortlake as her betrothed. Mr. Mortlake expressed his satisfaction privately, and assured me that he did not doubt that Mr. and Mrs. Harmond would be delighted to receive me as a son-in-law.

Julia treated me as if we had loved each other for years. I do not know why, but her manner made me nervous. On the other hand, I was gratified to find that she was much more accomplished than I had expected. She played the piano brilliantly; she sang nicely; showed some skill in the use of her pencil; and displayed a wonderful talent in all those little works which occupy ladies' fingers during leisure hours. We both wrote that day to her parents—I asking her hand, and telling them what was my fortune and position.

Julia was to return in two days to England, and before her departure we hoped to receive the consent of her family to our marriage. Meanwhile we were much together, and in her easy careless way she told me all about her relations. She did not appear to possess much affection for her father, but she always spoke of her mother with enthusiastic tenderness.

"They will be pleased," she said, "to learn that I am betrothed to you, after the unhappiness they have suffered through the misfortune of my sister."

"Your sister?" I exclaimed. "I thought you had neither brother nor sister."

"I mean my half-sister," she replied, indifferently—"the daughter of my father's first wife."

"And by what misfortune has she rendered your parents unhappy?"

"I will tell you. Ten years ago my father's brother-in-law took my sister to live with him. He died three months ago.

He was very rich, and he conceived such an affection for my sister that he would not rest till he had affianced her to his only son. It is only two years since all three were with us in London, and I thought George Marby (that was the name of my sister's intended) one of the most charming men it was possible to meet. He appeared to be very much in love, and nobody could have seen the two together without knowing that they were engaged, although the greatest familiarity I ever saw him take was to kiss her hand. They parted--she to return with old Mr. Marby to their country home, and he to spend a year in Italy. Some months after arrived a letter from George, stating that he loved a young French lady, and that he left his fate in the hands of my sister; if she insisted upon the fulfilment of their engagement, he would fulfil it. But my sister is very proud. She set him at liberty at once; she even used all her efforts to appease

his father, who was terribly irritated with him. And that is how Myra is still unmarried."

"Myra?" I said, abstractedly. "That is a pretty name."

"That is my sister's name. But there is something more: George's father was so affected by the conduct of his son that it is believed his death was partly caused by his chagrin; and my mother says that Myra has that upon her conscience."

"Your mother is wrong; it appears to me that under the circumstances your sister acted worthily and nobly. You do not appear to like her—why is that?"

Julia shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"Ah, well, she is certainly a good enough sister; but she is so reserved and so proud that it is not agreeable to be near her."

"Is she pretty?"

"No, not at all; and she scarcely possesses the smallest accomplishment. My mother says she can only do the honours of

a table, and that she could not help learning at her uncle's. Now he is dead, his son wished to divide his property with her, as with a sister, but she refused. My mother thinks she was wrong; but my father approves of all that she has done. She will soon be coming to live with us; which will not be very pleasant I fear, for my father yields to her in everything, and my mother has had several disagreeable scenes in consequence."

This conversation gave me a new inquietude. I saw, with pain, that the family of which I was about to become one was disunited; that the father and mother opposed each other on account of their children; that the sister, who was about to become mine, appeared to be cold, constrained, haughty, and perhaps rendered petulant by her misfortune. It was a melancholy prospect. I resolved to hasten my marriage, and to escape these family discords by keeping as far from them as possible.

We received the requisite consent to our marriage. Julia's father did not write, but her mother addressed to me a flattering letter—so flattering that it confused me. The excellent qualities of her daughter were not forgotten, and she felicitated me on my espousal of a woman who was, in many respects, a model of her sex.

Julia went away. I was alone again and deeply occupied with the reflections which my novel position suggested.

This girl is pretty, I thought—is accomplished; she loves me. What more can I desire?

At the same time I was astonished by the singular education she had received—at the care which had been taken to give her agreeable accomplishments, whilst in other matters her education had been neglected. Her letters troubled me and irritated me: the penmanship was awkward, and the orthography ridiculous, and the matter was of the most insignificant nature. The most

interesting piece of information she gave me in all this correspondence was that my dog Fido was always beside her. This dog was left to me by a brother who died abroad, and I liked the animal much. I responded to this passage of her letter by a faded compliment that my dog was happier than I, and that beside her it was the symbol of fidelity.

Some days later I was preparing to return to England, when I was visited by an old friend, Sydney Burnet, who was on his way to Italy, as he informed me—adding that he had halted at Boulogne expressly to have an interview with me.

“I have come to confide to you the happiness of my life,” he said, laughing, “and to make you my plenipotentiary.”

“In what?”

“You cannot guess,” he returned, advancing to the window to conceal his embarrassment. “It is a love affair, and you will soon be daily seeing the woman I adore.

You are to marry Julia Harmond, and I—well, there is no use in being extravagant—but I would give a great deal more than I possess if I could only obtain the same relationship to her sister Myra."

"What!" I exclaimed, "who is neither pretty nor young, and who has been jilted?"

"Who told you such nonsense?" he cried, warmly. Then he added, calmly: "She is not young, say you?—she is only two years older than Julia. She is not pretty?—she is beautiful. She has been jilted?—more fool he who jilted her, and who could not keep the pearl he had between his hands. That event is exactly what makes her more dear to me. For a long time I have liked her, and I thought I should go mad with joy when I learned that she was free."

"For all that," said I, quietly, "I should not like to marry a girl who has been jilted."

"I tell you the man was a fool, and unworthy of her," cried Sydney, excitedly.

"Well, have you spoken to her?"

"I have not dared yet."

"What would you have me do, then?"

"Watch over her, tell me all that passes around her, and at the first propitious moment speak of me to her. Should she listen with interest, give her this letter. It does not matter how old its date may be. My sentiments will be the same till death."

I gave him the promise he demanded with such ardour, and we parted. I have read somewhere that the ways of love must be watered with tears, as those of liberty with blood. He is a happy man who carries his love in his heart; for however feeble his hope, it suffices to enchant him. But surely marriage can be happy without such passion? Trying to answer that question to my own satisfaction occupied the journey to London.

II.

I PRESENTED myself about noon at the house of my betrothed. My arrival was unexpected. A domestic conducted me to a drawing-room, where the first object that attracted my attention was my dog Fido. I advanced to him, and you can imagine my surprise—I might almost say horror—when I discovered the dog was dead and stuffed. At the same instant the door opened, and Julia threw herself into my arms with a cry of joy, and calling upon her mother.

A lady still young and handsome approached me, embraced me as if I had been her own son, and invited me into the parlour. Before following her, I glanced towards my poor Fido.

"Ah," cried Julia, smiling, "I wept for the death of your dog; but I thought this would be such a delightful surprise for you. Is he not beautifully stuffed? One would almost fancy he was living?"

With the best grace possible, I concealed the annoyance which this unlucky event caused me, and passed into the parlour. My discontent was increased at the sight of four ladies, who were presented to me as friends of the family, and who were occupied with so many pieces of needlework that the tables, chairs, sofa, and everything were covered with draperies. After a little while I wished to withdraw, but was pressed to stay for dinner, and agreed. My future father-in-law entered, and saluted me with grave politeness.

The table was laid with considerable noise, and with so much disorder that I felt sick. After dinner Mr. Harmond went out, and I wished to follow him; but mother and daughter prayed me to spend this

evening with them, and again I yielded. I endeavoured to keep up a conversation of some sort; but I was perpetually interrupted by the laborious friends of the family. In the midst of a glowing description of the cathedral at Antwerp :

“ Good gracious, Louisa,” cries one, “ that sleeve is much too short.”

“ Not at all; it is quite as long as the other.”

Whereupon followed a grand discussion. Another cries :

“ I have no band, Mrs. Harmond.”

Another :

“ Will you give me a needle, Julia? ”

Then one after the other apologises for the interruption, which is immediately repeated by a debate as to the fold of a flounce or the trimming of a dress.

At length the hour for tea arrived, and I was heartily thankful that the evening was near a close. Julia rose to prepare tea, when her mother said :

"As we have worked all day, we deserve some amusement now. Sing that song, Julia, which I like so much." And Mamma smiled at me graciously.

Julia went to the piano, and sang a horrible bravura song, of which I thought I should never hear the last note. Meanwhile the tea had been waiting, and we were condemned to partake of a species of lukewarm water, mixed with I don't know what sort of insipid drug.

When the four friends of the family had at length folded up their needlework, put away their measures, and scissors, and patterns, it was almost midnight, and the question was how they were to get home.

"Do not be uneasy," said Julia. "Mr. Dale is a gallant cavalier, and will be happy to escort you."

I was fatigued, I was sleepy, and the suggestion had nothing in it very attractive to me; but there was no escape. I escorted the four ladies, who, to complete my misery,

lived in the four quarters of the town. When I reached home, three o'clock struck.

Very much in this manner passed the days at Bayswater. Perpetually the same disorder, and the same confusion of dress-makers and milliners—as if one had nothing to do in this world beyond attending to the fashions. Mr. Harmond observed with a species of silent resignation the state of his household. He made no useless suggestions; but I could see that he was a man who, when he did assert his authority, would not have it denied. I resolved to visit the house as rarely as was consonant with my position as the future husband of Julia: for when in the house, I was bothered; and when I went away, I was distressed and irritated. I never heard any of them utter a pleasing thought, and after spending an hour with Julia and her mother, I returned with eagerness to my chambers.

There was a happy change wrought upon Mr. Harmond by the reception of a letter

from his daughter Myra, announcing her speedy arrival. He addressed his wife and Julia kindly, and made known the intelligence which was to him so gratifying. But it did not affect the ladies in a similar way—indeed, I observed a slight curl on Mrs. Harmond's lips, which displeased me much. My future father-in-law treated me with greater cordiality upon this day than he had done hitherto; and he took me into his little study—to which he generally retired after dinner, leaving me with the ladies.

"I owe you many apologies," he said, "for not having replied to the letter in which you asked me for the hand of my daughter. My wife replied to you on the instant, and I scarcely know why I did not follow her example; but I must confess that I feel I have been unjust to Julia."

"Unjust!" I exclaimed, smiling incredulously: for I had learned to regard him as a man of kindly heart and firm will, who was incapable of injustice to any one.

“Yes—unjust,” he proceeded. “My pre-dilection for my first wife, and for the child who resembles her, has caused me to neglect the education of my second daughter. But nature has been kinder than I, for Julia is a good girl; and with a husband such as you, she will become, I hope, a good woman. Do not think I flatter, but the more I know you, the more I learn to regard you with esteem; and I trust you will forgive the coldness with which I at first received you.”

“I did not think of it, believe me.”

“Thanks. I find a deep consolation in thinking that when I am dead my poor child Myra will find in you a brother and a protector.”

At these words, he passed his hand over his eyes, as if to conceal emotion. Then, looking at his watch:

“It is time for us to rejoin the ladies. Come!”

This interview pleased me; and I became more and more attached to the man who

was to become my father-in-law. I liked his conversation ; and I was touched by the confidence he reposed in me. On the other hand, the character of Julia became daily more and more disagreeable ; but she seemed to have an honest heart, and she appeared to love me so truly that I dared not think of breaking an engagement which had been made so precipitately.

Divers circumstances retarded our marriage, and I desired to employ the time by giving Julia some lessons. But this was impossible with the habitual discord of the house—the numerous visitors and the ceaseless gossip in which they indulged.

I awaited, with feelings strangely mingled with hope and inquietude, the arrival of Myra. Perhaps she would work some happy change in the household.

III.

UPON my arrival at the house in Bayswater one day, Julia saluted me with :

“ My sister has come. I will present you to her.”

She led me into the drawing-room, which seemed suddenly to have obtained a new atmosphere—everything appeared so calm, so happy. A lady was seated at a table, writing with an air of profound occupation.

“ Myra,” cried Julia, gaily, “ here is Mr. Dale.”

She rose and approached us. How little she resembled the description of her I had received from Mrs. Harmond and Julia. She was a young girl, tall, graceful, and with a charming delicacy of form. Her

manner was animated, but unaffected as that of a child. I prayed her to pardon our interruption; and she responded to me in a voice that penetrated to my heart.

"It does not matter," she said; "tomorrow I can write home. Home? I mistake—my home is here." And she took Julia's hand fondly.

I passed the whole evening near her, almost without ceasing to regard her—finding some new interest every moment in contemplating her expressive face. It was not a beautiful face; but one could not imagine anything finer or more delicate. It suggested to me a freshly-opened flower. Her blue eyes were not large; but her glance was full of the light of a superior nature. Her small mouth was singularly expressive, and the half-open lips displayed two rows of pearls. I continued to look, continued to listen to her voice, and then I left. I was under a spell of enchantment for which I could not account.

From that day the house obtained quite another aspect: order and calm succeeded disorder and confusion. The conversation, also, became animated and interesting. Mr. Harmond, who had formerly deserted us every evening, now remained with us, and added to the pleasure of the circle. All this change had been brought round without exciting any disagreement between mother and step-daughter. In directing the household affairs, I could see that Myra really did the work; but she left all the credit to her mother. She consulted her with respectful deference, and seemed only to obey her orders.

Every evening, to please her father, she would seat herself at the piano and sing—not those difficult bravuras and cavatinas which try the patience of hearers and break the voices of amateurs, but simple ballads, which left an indelible impression. Then she would resign her place to Julia, and applaud warmly her interminable operatic selections.

I was not so inexperienced as to be ignorant of the nature of the sentiments which had awakened within me. I tried to resist the growth of the passion; but I could not. Sometimes I tried to find fault with her; I recalled all that Julia had told me of her coldness and hauteur (and, indeed, although she was always frank, there was a certain reserve in her manner which was distinctly observable); but this raised another torture. Despite myself, I desired eagerly to learn if she had cared for her cousin who had renounced her hand, and if she regretted her loss. At last I believed that I had solved the enigma.

I knew that she still corresponded with Marby; and one day her step-mother was reproaching her for holding any communication with the man who had so grievously wronged her.

“Wronged me?” she said, quietly. “He has not wronged me; on the contrary, he has proved his respect for me. He did not

wish to deceive me—he did not wish to accept a love to which his heart could not respond; and whilst I live, I will be grateful to him for that delicacy."

"No, no!" cried Julia. "If you had loved him as—as—I love somebody" (and here she glanced proudly at me) "you would not have renounced him so easily."

"The more I loved him," returned Myra, drooping her eyes, "the more I should have feared to make him unhappy."

"And how would you have made him unhappy?" broke in Mrs. Harmond. "He was betrothed to you, and you should have compelled him to fulfil his engagement. You would have done your duty, and reconquered his heart; and nobody would have pitied him, I'm sure."

"Reconquered his heart? Done my duty? Ah, no! Under the circumstances, it was impossible. Had we married, we would have promised to share good and evil fortune, and that he might have done. But

could we have accepted without reproach, without repining, the many little commonplace troubles of daily life? Could we rejoice in the same joys, support the little feebleesses of each other, and remain united in one faith? Could we share the same hope, the same resignation? Ah, no! That can only be obtained by sincere and mutual affection."

Her eyes brightened, her face glowed with enthusiasm. Then, taking her mother's hand—

"Pardon me," she said, "if I have spoken too warmly; but I could not hear you speak of Mr. Marby, as you have done, without defending him."

She loves him, I thought; and I felt the blood tingling through my veins. Mr. Harmond advanced to her, and passed his arm round her waist.

"My poor child," he said, "you have been sorely afflicted."

"At first I thought so, father; but I

know now that the affliction arose from my wounded vanity; and to-day I feel that what has happened has been for the best."

She does *not* love Marby, I thought. But just as she quitted the room, her father murmured, sadly—

"Poor child—poor child! I believe she loves him still."

I went away full of perplexity and pain. Another incident soon afterward showed me how strong was the mesh in which I had become involved.

I had not forgotten my promise to Sidney Burnet, but I easily found excuses for postponing its fulfilment; and, in truth, there was some difficulty in obtaining a private interview with Myra. I had, however, mentioned my friend's name several times in her presence. She had listened with interest, and had once expressed the regard she entertained for Mr. Burnet, who had been much with her during the last illness of her uncle.

On one occasion Julia and her mother were out. Myra was alone, and I resolved that day to fulfil my promise. But how shall I express the agony that the thought gave me? The more I thought, the more it appeared to me probable that Myra had been touched by the sympathy and attention of Burnet. Then I asked myself if honour obliged me to solicit a decision which would leave me only despair. I understood then how fierce was the passion to which I had surrendered myself.

The consciousness of my real position was becoming unbearable. The grace which was in every word and action of Myra presented such a contrast to Julia's frivolous ways and lack of refinement that the idea of being chained to her for life made me shudder (I was cool when these thoughts occurred to me); and then Julia began to suspect, and would regard me with such distress that I could not help pitying her and condemning myself.

There was no longer any plausible reason for the delay of our marriage ; and without asking my consent, Mrs. Harmond had fixed the day. The trousseau was in preparation, and I had the misery to see Myra working upon it. Those who have not been in a similar position will scarcely realize my suffering and anxiety. Not knowing what to do, I decided upon making another tour on the Continent that I might obtain relief from my torture for a little while. It was on the day previous to that fixed for my departure that the occasion for a private interview with Myra occurred.

She was alone, and I explained my mission with the same embarrassment, the same palpitation, as I might have felt in pleading my own cause. Myra, who at first listened to me with interest, drooped her eyes when I named the suitor for her hand. A soft flush rose to her brow.

“I regret,” she said, in a low voice, “that you have had so unthankful a task

to perform for your friends. But I never imagined he thought of me in the way you suggest ; and I am sorry to say that I can never regard him with other feelings than those of esteem and respect."

I held my friend's letter in my hand.

" Will you not, at least, read what he has written ? "

She made a movement as if about to take the letter ; then suddenly withdrew her hand.

" No," she replied, firmly ; " he would not have written to me had he known the sentiments with which I regarded him. I cannot read a letter which was written under an entirely erroneous impression ; and in refusing to read it, I give Mr. Burnet the best proof of my esteem and friendship."

The delicacy of these words, the dignity with which they were spoken, the joy of knowing that she did not love Burnet, threw me into such rapture that I was

on the point of throwing myself at her feet. But at that instant her father entered. As was his custom, he desired her to sing; but she excused herself, and placing a book in my hand, asked me to read. All that evening she kept her needle busy; she scarcely raised her head or spoke. She seemed to be anxious to avoid me, and I observed this with chagrin. My attentions to Myra excited some suspicion in the mind of my future mother-in-law; but Julia was not in the least uneasy.

“I know him,” she said, with a naïve confidence, “and he will always love me.”

When I acquainted Sydney Burnet with the result of my appeal on his behalf, he responded to me with more calmness than I had expected.

“How could I hope,” he wrote, “that she would love me? All that I ask is, that she will permit me to love her—that is, that she will suffer me to devote myself to the task of striving to secure her happy-

ness through life. I will regard her only as a sister—I will make every sacrifice she may require—if she will consent to bear my name. With time, my devotion may perhaps gain her affection. There is my hope, and I cannot renounce it—at least, till I know that she loves another."

Sydney desired me to show this letter to Myra. I obeyed him, and prayed her to read it. She consented, and that same evening placed in my hand a letter for my friend. I had to make a painful effort before I could part with that letter—I envied the man to whom it was addressed. Some days afterwards, Burnet returned it to me for my perusal.

"Your friend," said Myra, in her epistle, "has shown me your last letter. I learn with surprise the nature of the sentiments which you entertain for me; and, trust me, I regret sincerely that I cannot respond to them. You say that if I loved another, the knowledge of that would perhaps restore

you to calmness. Well, I do love another—and under such circumstances that my love must lie for ever hidden in my heart. Be sure, your affection for me is not more unhappy than is that of which I now tell you. I have, however, learned already to endure other miseries; and I hope that I shall be able to bear this one. I am glad to think that what is possible for a weak woman like me to do must be more easily accomplished by a strong man like you."

The reading of this letter filled me with rage at the thought of the happy unknown who had gained Myra's heart. I paced my chamber in agitation; but by and by I took up Burnet's own letter, which I had not yet read, and the frantic rage expressed by him served to calm me. Again I perused Myra's letter; and then I recognised all the nobleness and elevation of the few words she had written.

In the conflict of so many diverse thoughts and feelings, I resolved to make no further

delay in my departure. This journey appeared to me as my only chance of escape from the distraction into which I felt myself rapidly falling ; it would retard my marriage, and it would remove me from associations which were becoming daily more and more painful. Perhaps, with this relief, I might recover something of the mental repose which I had lost.

“What can I do ?” was my inward cry. “Myra loves another, and I can never be any more to her than a brother. The pleasure of obtaining even that relationship, and of preserving the friendship of her father, will, perhaps, compensate me for the unhappiness which I fear will follow my marriage with her sister.”

I will say nothing of the disturbance which was caused by the postponement of the marriage and my departure—the tears, the nervous attacks, and the semi-swoons of Julia. I took my leave of Mr. Harmond and his wife with sincere feelings of

regard. I kissed Myra's hand, and then went away.

My journey was pleasant enough to relieve me of many painful thoughts. I forced myself to overcome all the annoyances of sightseeing—to deliver all my letters of introduction, and to accept the invitations which ensued. In brief, I had recourse to every possible means whereby my thoughts might be distracted from my fatal passion. But at the very time when I was congratulating myself upon the victory over Self, an unexpected letter from England—which brought to me the melody of a dearly-remembered song, the vision of a face which was imprinted upon my heart—sufficed to dispel my hopes of victory.

Eight months had passed then. I had no longer any feasible excuse for remaining away from home. I returned to England the same as when I had left it; and I found the house of Mr. Harmond, like myself, unchanged.

The fifth day after my return was the anniversary of my birthday. I remembered with what tenderness my parents were wont to celebrate that anniversary, and in order to avoid the fuss which I was certain Julia and her mother would make, I said nothing about the important date. In the evening, I was, as usual, seated with them, trying to feel amused with snatches of insipid conversation. I heard Myra playing upon the piano in the next chamber. It was the first time since my return that I had heard her playing, and I passed into the other apartment.

When I approached her and saw her face, it seemed to me that it bore a more marked expression of settled melancholy even than before. There was also something of sadness in the tone of her voice as she sang, which suggested somehow to my ear the wail of a suffering soul.

It was a quiet summer evening, and the red rays of the setting sun fell softly upon

her face. One of these rays fell upon the stuffed form of my poor Fido.

"Ay," I thought, bitterly, "there is the image of my fidelity—a fidelity which has endured so poorly."

When Myra had ceased singing, I took her hand.

"Thank you," I said; "you have given me the greatest pleasure it was possible to give me in honour of my birthday."

"What! is this your birthday, and you have concealed it from us?" she cried.

There was something strange in her manner — a mingling of tenderness and affected gaiety. I could not help being serious.

"Do not betray me," I said; "I do not like to speak of this day, for my parents and all those who used to make it one of happiness are dead. Only you have again made it happy with your song—and I could wish that it was celebrated now for the last time," I added, gloomily.

At these words, she hurriedly turned her face ; but I knew that there were tears in her eyes and in her heart. I do not know whether the consciousness that her love was mine gave me most pain or joy. I pressed her hand to my lips. I tried to speak calmly, but despite myself my voice faltered.

“ Myra—for Heaven’s sake, pity me ! Oh, this is madness ! But I cannot help myself, Myra—I cannot help myself ! ”

She attempted to withdraw her hand, but I held it firmly.

“ Not yet—not yet, Myra. Before we part now, give me some token that will serve me as a remembrancer of this day.”

With a low cry, she broke from me and sprung to the door. There she paused.

“ No,” she said, with a passionate sadness ; “ there is no token to serve you as a remembrancer of your *sister* Myra save this : in my prayers I will think of you, and in prayer I will seek help to endure the pain you have given me.”

Then she went away; and I stood there in the dim light of the fading day, sick and hopeless, yet with a strange joy pulsing through me.

I returned to the chamber in which I had left Julia. Under the pretence of being slightly indisposed, I hastily took my leave. As I walked away from the house, my sense of honesty struggled hard with the passion which possessed me.

“She loves me!” I cried—“Myra loves me! What matters the rest? Nothing can now afflict me or humiliate me.”

IV.

NEXT morning, with a kindly solicitude, Mr. Harmond came to inquire if I had recovered from my indisposition.

"I was sorry you went away so early yesterday evening," he said, in his grave way, "for Julia and Myra were singularly melancholy, and my own humour was of the sourest. There are some days when I cannot overcome my misanthropy, and yesterday all my efforts would not avail me against it."

"Has anything unusual happened?"

"No; but I fear that something may happen. I tremble to see my poor Myra daily showing in her pale face and nervous

manner the symptoms of the disease of which her mother died. Yesterday evening she looked so ill that I shuddered at the thought of what may be approaching—she so much resembled my poor wife in her last days. You must yourself have observed the change. I am certain that some secret sorrow is preying upon her. Almost every evening during your absence she would sit by the window till the lights were brought in, and then we remarked that she had been crying. Heaven forgive George Marby ! I do not wish him evil, but he has destroyed the happiness of my daughter."

I listened to him in silence. I knew the cause of Myra's affliction, and when I was alone, I considered what steps ought to be taken. There was no time to hesitate. It was necessary that I should save the woman I loved so ardently. I resolved to open my heart to her father. I could not find a better friend.

In the afternoon I proceeded to the

house, and upon entering the drawing-room I found Julia there alone. She appeared to have been weeping.

"My mother is out," she said, turning away her face, "and my sister is with her." Then bursting into tears, "My mother has told me several times that you do not love me. I would not believe her, but last night I dreamed that my father brought me a letter—the same as the one Myra received from Mr. Marby when he broke off his engagement. I have been weeping for hours, and I pray Heaven that I may not live long if such misery is to befall me."

Without speaking, I took Julia's hand, pressed it to my lips, and went away. I walked quickly—as if I could run from the agony of my own thoughts. I did not know where I was going—I did not care. I walked on, a prey to inexpressible anguish, out of the city, into the green fields; and I was ignorant of the pain which I had yet to endure.

Next day Mr. Harmond came to me with a smiling countenance.

"Yesterday, you shared my sorrow," he said, shaking my hand—"to-day you shall share my joy. Why did you not wait for us last night? Why were you not a witness of our glad surprise? When we were all sitting in a species of gloomy silence, there came a loud knock at the door, and presently a young man entered and threw himself into my arms. Imagine my amazement—it was Marby, our fugitive Marby, and still unmarried. A question of religion had caused him to break off the union he had meditated. Myra had not heard from him for a long time, and believed the affair terminated."

"And what will she do now?" I cried, with an emotion that almost choked me.

"What will she do now? That is easily understood. Like a sensible sinner, he comes back asking pardon; and he is a

very repentant sinner, I assure you. He seems to be fonder of Myra than ever."

" And Myra ? "

" Myra ? Well, she did not receive him exactly as the prodigal was received ; but she appeared to be very well pleased to see him. When he referred to their engagement she stopped him by saying, '*Brother*, you will come to see me to-morrow, and we will talk about everything—there are many things of which we will have to speak.' I believe that he is with her now," added Mr. Harmond, looking at his watch, " and it will be strange if he does not win her forgiveness—but in the name of Heaven what is the matter with you ? "

I do not know what reply I gave him. I only know that I promised to go and dine with them. And I went and saw him—my rival, George Marby. His countenance was amiable, and yet energetic ; his manner frank and cordial. I recognised all these good qualities with bitter feelings of jealousy.

But there was an air of such thorough good-nature and honesty in all he said and did that I could not help admiring him. The conduct of Julia was not such as to cause me any great anxiety ; although the warmth of her manner in greeting the new-comer would undoubtedly have alarmed me, had I not had so much reason to upbraid myself. I had no right to speak.

“ We have known each other since we were children,” she said, smiling, and as if in explanation.

Two days of troublous thought ; and I proceeded to Bayswater, expecting to learn that the day for Myra’s marriage had been fixed. As I opened the door of the parlour I heard Mr. Harmond :

“ Then what answer shall I give him ? ”

I paused undecided. Myra glanced towards me with a look so pitiable, so distressed, that my pulse quickened, and I sprang to her side,

I knew her secret at last. She was mine !

I myself had won the affection of her brave heart, and for me she had perhaps borne anguish great as my own.

She hurriedly quitted the chamber, and Mr. Harmond regarded me in surprise. I was confused, dazed; for her love only rendered my position the more perplexing and painful. Muttering some excuse, I retired. I had only gone a few paces from the door when my arm was grasped by George Marby.

"Will you permit me to accompany you?" he said, in a friendly voice.

"Willingly, sir," I answered, coldly. I expected a fierce quarrel.

When we entered my chamber he took my hand and shook it warmly.

"I congratulate you," he said, frankly. "You and Myra are free, and I am about to marry Julia."

I regarded him with a species of stupefaction.

"It is true," he proceeded. "I have

been blind, but to-day my eyes have been opened ; and my course is decided. I have made a confidant of Mr. Harmond, and he approves my resolution. I have also spoken to Julia's mother, and she has given her consent. There is a letter which Julia has written to you breaking off her engagement to you, but I do not think it will afflict you."

My joy was too great to be concealed, and my countenance betrayed me.

"Ah, I see," cried Marby, "you are not going to faint."

At the same instant Mr. Harmond entered.

"Is it true?" I cried; "will you indeed give me Myra? And you, Marby—how shall I ever thank you? But stay, is not this a sacrifice?—will you not suffer?"

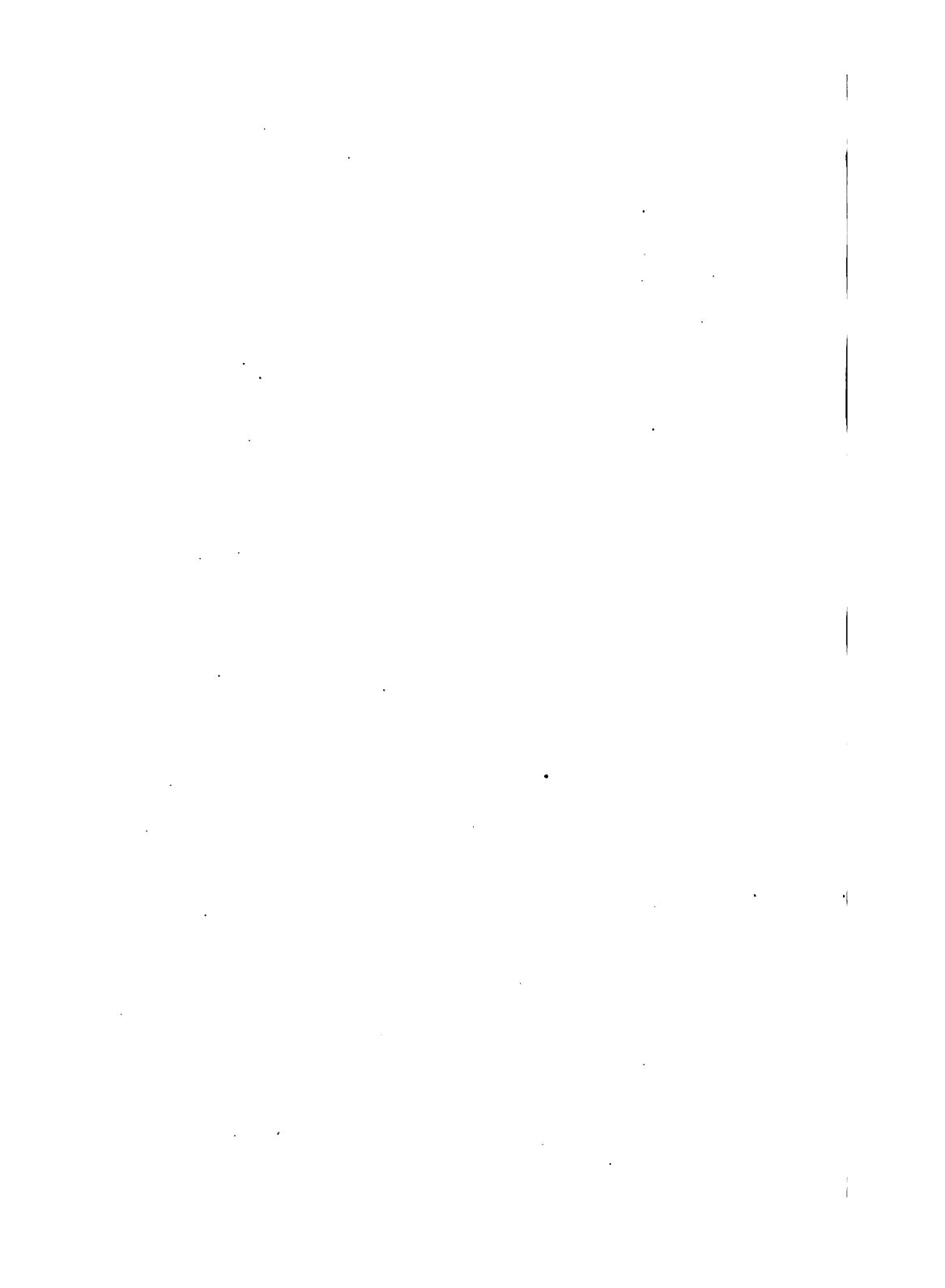
"Suffer? I should be a fool to be unhappy in becoming the husband of such a good and pretty girl as Julia. I count upon perfect happiness; Myra will be happy also,

and I shall have accomplished the wish of my father."

"Come," said Mr. Harmond, "they are waiting our return."

You know the rest. There was a happy meeting ; and two happy marriages were celebrated in Hanover Square about six weeks afterwards.

D A F T T A M.



D A F T T A M.

I.

A SEVERE snowstorm stopped our train in the Howe of the Mearns, as the place is called. The line runs between deep embankments, and the drift was so great that it was impossible to proceed, although snow-ploughs were at once set to work. Happily we were near a village, and as all the efforts of the station-master and his assistants failed to get us forward, we made our way as best we could to the village inn, the landlord of which happened to be a very amusing character.

Another piece of good fortune was that one of the most favourite opera singers of the day was with us.

The host promptly provided us with an excellent supper, and his stores must have been taxed to their limit, for we were all hungry, and then the songstress made our hearts joyful by her voice. She sang several of the songs which had made her most popular, and succeeded in cheering the hearts of her unfortunate fellow-travellers.

This led to a round of songs and anecdotes, whilst we waited for the intimation that the line had been cleared. Much to our surprise, we found in the landlord a capital story-teller. He had lived a long time in Glasgow as the manager of a tavern belonging to a widow, and there he had become acquainted with a gentleman who had wasted his fortune, and ruined his reputation in consequence of an unfortunate attachment to a woman.

This was the story our host told us, and I will try to give it in his own words :—

I was brought up in Glasgow, and at the

time that what I am going to tell ye aboot happened, I was sort of general manager for Mrs. Forsyth, wha had the Prince's inn, a wee bit doon ane of the wynds leading frae the Trongate tae Prince's Street. She was a kindly, weel-faured body, wi' a bonnie dochter. Her guidman had died when the lassie was jist a bairn, leaving the widow naething but the stock-in-trade tae provide for hersel' and the lass. That she managed wi' sae muckle thrift, that when Bessie Forsyth was aichteen the house was ane of the maist thriving in Glasgow, and her mither had a pickle siller in the bank.

The inn had nae pretensions tae grandeur aboot it, but was jist a cosy auld-farrant change-house. At the time of the last Stuart outbreak, the Bonnie Prince Charlie had met wi' some frien's in this vera house, and that was hoo it got the name ; but in my time it was better kent as plain Tibbie's Howf—Tibbie was Mrs. Forsyth's Christian name, ye maun ken.

Bessie was a bonnie lass, and a guid kind-hearted lass, as mony a hungry wame in the wynd could testify. The Trongate, wi' its face of thriving shops and warehouses, jist masked great dens of poverty that every day sent out their starving swarms of orra characters. Bessie was a guid frien' tae mony of the puir creaturs when hunger was driving them sair.

Our wynd was nae better nor waur nor the ither wynds and closes aboot. There was jist the ord'nar mixture of guid and bad, and ye couldna aye tell vera weel whilk was whilk. Ye might hae looked frae the window of the cosy parlour of Tibbie's Howf across the wynd and ye would hae seen a heigh ramshackle of a house, brown wi' dirt, and a' crackit wi' age and want of repair. Every mornin' I expectit tae see't drap tae bits. It was crowded wi' fishwives and barrowmen, hawkers of everything, honest and dishonest folks of a' ages, but every ane of them equal in poverty. I'm

no sure, but if there was ony difference atween them in this respect, the honest bodies had the warst o't.

Ye wouldna think that the sort of place for a young lassie tae grow up in guid and pure? But sae it was wi' Bessie, and wi' mair nor her I doubtna if the truth were kent; for it's wonnerfu' what guidness comes out of the mire that hings round our lives, whether we bide in the wynds of the Trongate or Briggate, or in the crescents of the west end.

We used tae hae a curran of students and actor folk come aboot our place, and whiles some of the actors bidin' wi' us. Amang the students was ane David Lamond, wha was gaun to be a minister. He was the son of a doctor's widow in Kilwinning, and the leddy had jist enuch adae tae scrape thegither the siller tae get the lad colleged. He wasna exactly a wastral, for he'd but sma' change to spen', and I never saw him fou except ance, and that time he

was mair wud than fou. He wasna a bad-lookin' chiel, although there was aye something queer about his een that I couldna understan' until after he was charged wi' murder. The een were aye sunken like, and swalled aneath the sockets, as if he'd been in the habit of drinkin' a lot, or hadna got sleep enuch. I kent it couldna be the drink, and so I thocht it was the study, and that maybe he didna tak' sleep enuch. However, he wasna a bad-lookin' chiel, as I said, and he had a pawky open-handed way wi' him, pinched as his purse was, that gar't ye like him.

It gar't our Bessie like him mair nor her mither would hae cared if she had kent. Out of a' the young lads that cam' about the house, she seemed to be ta'en wi' the ane that was puirest an' proudest—for David Lamond was as proud as a hielan' laird, whilk didna agree weel wi' a toom pouch. Hoosever, I didna like tae meddle wi' sic matters, sae I said naething ; although

I watched what was gaeing on, and I sune
saw that there was doonricht courtin' afoot
under Tibbie's neb, while she never cheeped
a hint that she kent about it.

Lamond cam' tae our place first wi'
a birky ca'ed Tam Marshall, or "Crackit
Tam," as he was kent among his cronies,
and I never saw a man wha was better
named. Tam was a lang thin chiel, ower
lang for his strength it seemed, for his back
was bowed maist double. He wasna mair
nor thirty-five year auld, but he looked
twenty year aulder.

He belanged tae Edinburgh, and that he
was weel educated ye'll ken whan I tell
ye that he was an advocate by profession,
and micht hae made siller if he had stickit
till his trade, for there was nae doot that
he was clever, and had a by-ord'nar gift
of the gab. But something happened till
him, and after that he took tae drink, and
was scarcely ever seen sober, sae that at
last his goon was stripped aff him. Syne

he cam' tae Glasgow, set up as a schule-master, and would hae got on weel at that, for a'body liked him, but the drink interfered.

He had to gi'e up the schule, and he drappit doon—it was nae gradual fa', bit by bit, but jist a regular drap doon tae that state when nae respectable body would employ him. He was turned out of ae lodging after anither, until he took the tap-room of the ramshackle of a house opposite the howf, and he got his living, if ye ca' it that, by helping some of the weel-tae-dae students ower their examinations, and by getting four or five shillings a week, and a' his drink free, as chairman of a free-an'-easy music-hall in the Sautmarket.

It was maist pitiable to think of a man of his education bringing himsel' tae sic a pass; but ance there, he was the verra man for the place. He could sing a vera guid (and sometimes no a vera guid) sang in a round voice, and tell stories by the yard.

That made him a great favourite with the young men of the toon. I hae heard them saying that Crackit Tam was the maist amusing chiel they had ever met.

But I kent that he suffered sairly, for I saw him as naebody else had the chance of seeing him. Mony a nicht, when our place was shut up, I hae had tae help him across the wynd and up till his lodging. The stairs were dark, and in twa or three places gey shaky. His room was jist aneath the roof. The wa's were bare and the plaster broken, so that the laths were visible, and allowed the wind tae come whistling through the room. There was for furniture jist a black table, an auld stool, and a wooden box. There was a worn mattress lying on the floor in ae corner, wi' the straw sticking out ower't, and a thin dirty brown blanket, and that was his bed.

Whiles I would bring twa or three bits of stick wi' me and kindle a fire, and he would sit on a stool, drucken an' stupid as ye

would think, his arms sprawling ower the table, and his head bowed doon on them. I dinna ken why it was I felt sae muckle for this man. Maybe it was because I never had ony education mysel', and was sorry to see sae muckle o't wasted in him. Ony way, I was wae for him, mad drucken loon as he was. In the dead of winter, however, he hadna a bit of fire except what I made for him; and he never had a bit of bread exceptin' what our Bessie sent up till him.

I never imagined that he gied a thocht tae her kindness, or was any way grateful for't, or for what I did for him. I had come tae think of him jist as a puir dementit creatur', that had nae thocht beyond getting whiskey to droon his ain griefs. But ae nicht in November, when I had jist blawn the sticks into a bleeze, he lifted his head and stared at me in sic a wild fashion, wi' his een as red as a fox's, and glittering in the light that I was making

ready tae jump frae my knees and rin,
thinking he'd gaen clean out of his senses.

"Rob Skeoch," he said, speaking thick like, and wi' a queer look of desperation, that I had never seen on his face before. It was the look of a man mad wi' pain, and the knowledge that there was nae help in this worl' for't. "Rob Skeoch, ye'r a guid sowl; and Bessie Forsyth, she's anither guid sowl; and there's d—— few of them in this worl', especially of the womankind."

I wasna weel pleased to be there my lane wi' him at that murk hour when he was in this state. I didna ken what he micht dae if a fit of the horrors seized him, and couldna help looking roun' to see that there was nae dangerous weapon near him. I was doonricht feart when I saw on the mantelpiece near him an auld rauzor case, and I had nae doot the rauzor was inside it.

"Dae ye think Bessie cares aboot David Lamond ?" he said, no mindin', and no suspecting what I feared.

“Lord, man, how should I ken?” was my answer, and I was a wee astonished by his question, for it showed me he’d been watching events when naebody ever thocht he noticed anything exceptin’ his pipe and his glass.

“I think she does,” he gaed on, “and I ken he cares for her ; anyway, he says sae, and if he were to gie the bonnie lass any fash, by the heavens aboon I’ll gie him the best thrashing he ever got in a’ his born days.”

He leuch in an unco uncanny way, and syne a’ of a sudden draps intae his ord’nar tone and manner.

“I say, Robbie, could ye no get us jist a wee gill afore ye gang tae bed ? Man, I feel as if there were a brimstane furnace in my throat, an’ a’ the deevils wi’ the swine in my wame, sae that I’ll no rest the-nicht if ye’ll no gie’s jist ae dram.”

He pleaded hard, but I wadna agree, and left him tae himsel’.

On account of what he said tae me, I watched David Lamond and Bessie mair particular than before; and I kent frae a thousand wee acts and looks, that Bessie had gi'en the lad her whole heart. She was an earnest quiet lassie, that rarely said muckle, but she felt and thocht muckle. I wasna sae sure aboot him, for that queer cast of his een fashed me.

Hoosever, Lamond gaed tae Edinburgh tae visit some acquaintances, and didna come back till the middle of December, missin' sax weeks of his classes. As sune as he cam' I saw that there was a change in him, and Bessie saw it tae. Instead of comin' tae see her on the first day of his return, as he used tae dae, he was nearly a week in the toon afore he cam'. I saw the cloud setting on Bessie's face. Her mither couldna mak' oot what was the matter wi' the lass, and mair than ance I heard her flytin' the puir creatur for being sae stupid and forgetfu'.

David cam' at last, and Bessie's face was like a lowe wi' joy for the first minute, and the next minute the cloud grew darker than it had been afore. The change in him was plain, though I couldna say exactly in what it consisted, exceptin' maybe that his veesits were shorter than they used to be, his een were mair sunken, and he had a waunerin' way of speakin', as if he was conscious of havin' dune something wrang.

What brought the woman tae our house guidness kens, but it was a dark day for her that she cam'. The woman was the great Maddymosell Florence d'Etoile, as she was ca'd in the circus bills, whaur there was a gran' pictur' of her loupin' through girrs covered wi' paper. But I foun' oot after that her real name was plain Flora Bethune. She had come tae perform at the circus that was doon by on the green, and she had been recommended tae oor house by the manager. She asked tae be accommodated wi' a bedroom and sittin' room for three weeks, as

she was tae bide ower the New Year's Day. Besides, it being her business, Tibbie was aye willin' tae oblige, and she was ta'en wi' the leddy frae the first minute. I maun admit that I was ta'en wi' her mysel', for she was a fine leddy, wi' the brichtest een and the bonniest mou' I had ever seen. I canna explain her charm tae ye, but when ye were in her presence ye jist felt as if ye were in a garden of roses wi' the sun shining on ye.

We gi'ed the leddy the twa rooms at the back o' the house, that were lichted frae a close that ran parallel wi' the wynd. The windows were jist ae storey frae the grun'. The doors opened on the lobby, and there was a door inside frae the sitting-room to the bedroom. She hadna been three days in the house before I understood the change in David Lamond. He had seen Maddy-mosell in Edinburgh, got acquainted wi' her somehow, and the laddie had gane clean daft about her, although she was ten year

aulder than himsel' and didna care a pin for him.

And Bessie saw it a', puir lassie; but she made nae complaint. The cloud jist deepened on her bonnie face, and she seemed tae shrink awa frae everybody, and especially frae her lad, wha was rinnin' helter-skelter tae the deevil. Tam Marshall noticed that Bessie wasna lookin' weel, and wonnered what was the cause. He hadna seen Maddymosell yet.

Tibbie was tae gie a gran' supper tae her chief customers on Hogmanay nicht, and I think she was ower ta'en up wi' the preparation of her haggis, whilk was aye a famous dish at the Howf, tae notice that Bessie was lookin' waur nor usual on that day.

It was a cauld misty day. There was nae snaw; but there was plenty of glaur, and sheuchs fu' of pasty water that the wheels of every cart or cab jaupit on the passengers. Lamond ocht tae hae been at the supper, but he didna appear, and I

jaloosed that he was awa at the circus—the gowk—dancing attendance on Maddymosell. Daft Tam Marshall was late a-comin', and when he did come I noticed immediately that there was something queerer nor usual in his manner. His een glowered and looked big, and he seemed tae be listenin' and watchin', as if he was expeckin' somebody. He met Bessie in the lobby and spoke twa or three words wi' her. She said he grippit her hands, and, lookin' at her in an unco earnest way, wished that the year that was jist gaen might be the warst of her life. Syne he cam' intae the room and got his share of the haggis, and declared it was the best Tibbie had ever made. But he scarcely ate ony. Hoosever, what he didna eat he made up for in drink. I never saw him tak' glass after glass wi' sic rapidity, jist as though he had been tryin' a race wi' the last hours of the year; and I never heard him say sae mony funny things a' the time I kent him. He kept the company

jist splittin' their sides wi' lauchter at his stories and jokes. A' the while he was listenin' and watchin'.

A' at ance, and in the middle of ane of his stories, he started up and went out of the room. I gaed after him in a minute, tae see what was the matter. He was standin' in the lobby, leanin' his shouther against the wa' and shadin' his een wi' his hands. Maddymosell was jist passin' the bar, and the licht shone on her beautiful face. I thocht Tam gasped for breath as she rustled by him and up the stair, no noticin' him as he was in the shadow.

David Lamond was ahint her, wi' an eager look on his face, as if waitin' for her tae say something. He was followin' her when Tam raxed out his arm and, without noise, drew him back. When the door of her room at the stairhead closed, Tam was shiverin' as if he were cauld, and he spoke wi' a thick drucken-like gasp atween ilka word.

“ Was—that—the woman—ye tauld me aboot? ”

"Aye—dinna stop me the noo. I want tae hae her answer——"

"Ye shall hae't frae me, ye idiot, that would break the heart of a braw true lassie for sic a painted Jezebel as yon."

"Let go!" said Lamond, angrily.

I was at that minute ca'd back tae the room, and when I got out again neither Marshall nor Lamond was visible.

A-wee after eleven o'clock our party was broken up, and a' except the folk that were bidin' in the house gaed awa. We had three commercial travellers bidin' wi' us, besides Maddymosell; but they had gaen out to see the fun at the Cross, whar the crowd was gatherin' tae watch the demise of the last minutes of the year, and tae gie the new year a welcome when the Tron steeple announced its birth wi' the last stroke of twal.

Tibbie and Bessie were sittin' in the bar parlour thegither, and Tibbie bade me gang up tae Maddymosell and ask her tae come

doon and sit wi' them till the new year cam' in. I gaed up. She hadna gaen tae bed, for the licht was shinin' aneath the door of the sittin'-room.

I was jist gaun to chap at the door, when I heard David Lamond's voice, and my hand stopped.

"O Lord, O Lord," he was moanin', "and it's a' true."

"Aye, it is true," said the leddy, and her voice, that was for ord'nar sae sweet and musical, sounded like a crackit bell; "but dae me the justice, sir, tae admit that afore I thocht there was ony chance of your kennin' the miserable truth I warned ye frae me, I tauld ye tae gae awa and never look at me again."

"Aye, aye, ye hae tauld," he said, wi' the bitterness of gall in his tone; "but if I had been rich——"

"Thank Heaven, sir, that ye werena rich, for your poverty has saved ye frae me. Perhaps it would hae been different had ye

been rich ; but I think mysel' that even had ye had millions I would hae dune jist the same, for I pitied you, Mr. Lamond, and I liked the lassie wha loves ye, and wha's wee finger is worth mair than a' my body. Noo gae, and try if ye can win back your ain respect and her esteem."

" And what are ye tae dae ? " he said.

" I'll leave this house the morn," she answered quietly. " And I'll take care that I dinna cross *his* path again."

At this I chappit at the door, and there was a minute's pause : then she said, " Come in."

She was standin' at the ither end of the table, her hands lifted tae tak' aff her bonnet, and she was lookin' frichted like at the door as it opened. David Lamond was sittin' on a chair at the side of the room, his elbows on his knees, and his head jist lifted frae his hands, lookin' white as snaw and terrible fierce, as if he was gaun tae loup at me and choke me. They seemed tae

be baith relieved when they saw wha it was.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Skeoch," she said, drawing a breath and takin' aff her bonnet.

I took nae notice of David's presence, but I saw that he was a wee put oot wi' me finding him there.

"Mrs. Forsyth would be glad if ye'd come doon an' sit wi' her till the new year comes in, if ye're no ower wearied," I said.

"I will hae muckle pleasure," she answered briskly, wi' ane of her bricht smiles. Syne she threw her bonnet on the table, and was awa' doon the stair in a jiffey.

"Rob, I wish ye would gi'e me a bed in the house the nicht," said David, as sune as she had gane. "I'm no weel, and I want tae lie doon."

"Our beds are a' occupied, sir," I said, stiffly.

"Ye can let me hae the sofa in the smoking-room, then: any place will dae for me."

I was gaun tae refuse him, but the puir chiel did look sae weakly and distraught that I couldna find it in my heart tae turn him oot of the house. Sae I got a pillow and a blanket, and took him doon tae the smoking-room.

The room was dark when we gaed in, and as I was striking a licht David gied the table a shove, I thocht, and jist then, as the match I had struck begun tae bleeze, the door was shut tae wi' a bang and blew it oot.

"Whaur did ye leave Tam Marshall?" I asked.

"Up in his bield, at the tap of the house yonder," he said wi' a wry face, and drawing his shouthers thegither.

He threw himsel' doon on the sofa, without attempting tae draw the blanket ower him.

I was wonnerin' wha would be our first-fit that nicht, and ran oot tae the Cross tae see the fun, just as the first stroke of the

hour boomed ower the toon. But I didna get ony farther nor the mouth of the wynd, the crowd was sae great in the street. There was a fire kennilt wi' some auld barrels at the Cross, in spite of the police, and the bleeze shone on the swarm of faces that were upturned tae the clock. There had been noise and steer enuch a minute syne, but frae the first stroke of the hour tae the last there wasna a word spoken or a body moved. But when the last stroke sounded, there was sic a cheer gaed up intil the air as gart the auld houses round aboot shake again. Hands, hats, and bottles were waved like the branches of trees aboon oor heads. Then anither cheer, and anither, and syne the guid word passed frae man tae man, whether ane's neebor was frien', foe, or stranger—

“ A guid New Year, and mony of them.”

That was the word, and it passed roun' the toon like lichtnin'. The crowd separated singing an' shouting “ Hooch for Ne'ardey,”

and ilk ane wi' his bottle in his oxter-pouch speeded awa tae first-fit his frien's, tae black-fit some bonnie lassie—that is, ye ken, tae introduce a lad till her wi' matrimonial intentions—and tae spend the nicht in merrymaking, drinkin' whiskey, and eatin' curran' bun, shortbread, and farls of oatcake.

I gaed back tae the Howf and chappit. Bessie answered the door, an' asked wha was there.

"It's me. Has naebody been here yet?"

"No yet."

"Weel, I'll bide a wee, for it's no lucky for ane o' the house tae be their ain first-fit. That was why I chappit." Sae I bided till twa or three of oor customers, wha had been at the supper, cam' doon the wynd, and were let in wi' the salutations of the day and their bottles. They didna bide lang, and I was glad o't. Bessie slippit awa' tae her bed, and Tibbie followed as sune as our frien's gaed awa'. Maddymosell had

gaen tae her bed as suné as she had heard the folk at the door.

I sleepit in that mornin', and a'body else did the same. I was jist pittin' on my claes when there was a skirl gaed through the house that gart my hair rise. It was the skreich of a woman, and that woman was our Bessie. I got haud of a candle and ran doon the stair.

Bessie was lyin' insensible on the first landin', and a caunle she had been carryin' was burnin' the carpet beside her, in danger of settin' her claes afire. I snatched it up, and lookit what was them atter, jist as Tibbie, our twa servants, and the gentlemen frae numbers three, five, and sax cam' rinnin' tae the spot mair or less dressed.

We were stanin' fornenst Maddymosell's bedroom door, whilk was open, and a caunle burnin' inside. The sicht we saw was enuch tae mak' even strong men trimmle and haud their breath wi' horror.

David Lamond stood near the bed, his

claes a' rumpled, his hair tossed ower his face, his een startin' frae his head wi' terror, and in his hand was a rauzor. The hand and the rauzor were red.

On the bed lay Maddymosell ; puir thing, I could pity her noo, mindin' what she had said about Bessie. She was quite dead. There was an awfu' gash in her throat, her bonnie face was contraket wi' pain, the lang saft hair was spread ower the pillows, and the wee hands were clinched thegither. There were red streaks on the face and the white bedclaes.

I was jist dumfoun'ert, and could neither speak nor move at first. The sicht gied me a scunner that I'll never get the better of. There could be nae doubt that the leddy had been murdered, and no ane of us wha were lookin' at the man could doubt wha was the murderer.

Like ane in a dream he pointed tae the bed, and then tae Bessie lying on the floor.

That seemed tae wauken me. I got

Bessie carried back tae her bed, and her mither staid wi' her tryin' tae bring her tae. The three gentlemen had kept guard on Lamond, and when I gaed tae him again I went intae the room and questioned him. He couldna speak for a while, but jist stood shiverin' and lookin' at the bed, as if there was some power compellin' him tae look at the horror in spite of himsel'.

When he did manage tae speak, he could gie nae explanation, or wouldna gie ony. He seemed to be as muckle horror-stricken as ony of us, but he could offer nae reason for being in that room, and in the condition we found him. He said again and again that he minded naething frae the time I left him tae the minute when Bessie's skriech startled us all. He protested he kent naething about hoo he cam there, or what had been doune.

I had sent for the police. The Inspector cam, the Fiscal cam; but they made nae mair o't than I had doune mysel', except

that they discovered that the window of the dead leddy's sitting-room was open.

David was ta'en awa tae the jail. He was in a stupefied condition, and made nae objection tae onything that was said or dounie to him. He seemed to be past speakin', mair than tae mutter ower and ower in a dreamy hopeless way that he kent naething about it. The Fiscal took charge of the rauzor, but afore he took it awa' I had looked at the blade, and saw the maker's name was "Simmons, Sheffield."

It was nicht afore Bessie cam' tae hersel'. It was a miserable New Year's Day for us, and we were oblieged tae keep the door shut and the blinds of the windows doon a' day tae keep out the crowds that cam' tae glower at the house. We were a' sick and bewildered, movin' about on tiptae and scarcely speaking abune our breath, feelin' some mysterious fear of the sorry thing lying in the room at the stairhead.

But Bessie was the ane maist cruelly

afflicted by the crime ; for, as it happened, on her evidence rested the conviction of the man she would hae died to save.

The Fiscal suspected the state of the case at ance, and he was kindly wi' her. Sae bit by bit he wormed it a' oot of her. She had been gaun doon the stair in the mornin', and when she had got tae the first floor she saw the door of the murdered leddy's room open, and a licht burnin' inside. She was surprised at that, for Maddymosell was a late riser. As she advanced tae gae doon the second stair, she cam in sicht of the bed. Then she stopped, trembling ; for there was a man bendin' ower the bed. He lifted himsel' up and turned slowly roun'. Bessie saw that it was David Lamond. She saw the rauzor and the red marks, and syne she minded nae mair.

The words were drawn frae the lassie like sae mony draps of her heart's bluid.

In the space of twa days there was a pile of evidence against the lad strong enuch to hing half-a-dozen men.

For puir Bessie's sake, I determined tae dae my endeavour tae help him. I engaged an agent for him, a respectable clever lawyer, Mr. M'Conochie, of George's Street, and I sent word to his mither. The puir woman cam' up the neist day in an awfu' state of distress about her son. She cam tae me, no kennin' weel what she was tae dae tae get speaking wi' David.

As we were gaun oot of the wynd, somebody pu'ed my coat tail. I turned roun' an' saw a woman wha bided in the close ahint our house. She was the wife of a carter named Saunders, wha didna use her ower weel. She had wi' her her dochter Jeanie, a wee raggit an' barefit lassie, about ten year auld.

"I tried tae get speakin' a word wi' ye, Mr. Skeoch," she said, "yesterday, an' the day afore, but ye were aye ower muckle occupied. Here's something our Jeanie found in the close."

She gied me the tap of a rauzor case as she spoke.

"Whar aboots did she find it?" I said, starin' at it, and at the woman, for it had aroused a suspicion, or a hope, I didna ken which.

Mrs. Lamond gaed wi' us, and the lassie Jeanie pointed out the exact spot whar she had found the thing. It was richt aneath the window of the leddy's sitting-room, the window we had found open. I looked up the wa', and—ye'll mind, that Hogmanay was an unco glaury day—and I saw, as plain as could be, marks of glaur, as if made by the boots of some ane slidin' aff the window-ledge tae drap doon in the close.

"What way did ye no tell me this suner," I said, "or take the thing tae the police office?"

"I couldna get speaking wi' ye, and I didna think there was onything particular aboot it till I heard that the rauzor didna belang tae onyboddy in the house. Besides, Jeanie didna say onything aboot it till I saw her playin' wi't an' speirt."

I took Mrs. Saunders and the bairn wi' us tae the Fiscal.

He got permission for Mrs. Lamond tae see her son, and syne gaed doon tae examine the wall himsel'.

Dayid was sitting in a corner of his dark cell, doubled up, as though he were trying tae bring his taes and his nose thegither. The mither sprang tae him; he started up frichted, and then, when he saw wha's arms were roun' his neck, he jist gied ae big gasp for breath, and drew her close tae his breast.

"Ye're innocent, Davie lad," she cried, "say that ye're innocent of this terrible crime."

He gied anither big gasp, and syne began and tauld her a' aboot it whilst she lay sabbin' and greetin' on his breast. And yet, even when his ain mither prayed and begged him tae dae't—even then he didna deny his guilt. He jist said ower again, he didna ken anything aboot it frae the time he had

lain doon on the sofa till he heard Bessie Forsyth's skriech.

Mrs. Lamond clappit her hands thegither wi' a wild look.

"I ken, I ken noo," she cried, half greetin', half lauchin', as if she was gaun tae hae a fit of hysterics; "I ken noo, ye hae been walkin' in ye'r sleep again, and—"

"Whist, whist, mither, for God's sake," he cried, wi' a mair terrified manner than he had shown, even when we had first discovered him, and shiverin'; "that's what I'm feart of—that's what I'm feart of. I dread that in my sleep I might hae dune't."

"No, no—my God, my God—no that, Davie," cried the mither, tichtnin' her grip around him, as if tae haud him frae the danger she couldna help fearin' hersel', while he pressed his han' desperately on his een. "No that, Davie, but troubled about the evil woman in your sleep, dreaming maybe that she was in danger, ye hae gaen

tae her chaumer, ye hae found her murdered, ye hae picked up the weapon that the murderer had left ahint him. And while it was in yer han' ye hae been waukened by Bessie Forsyth's skreich—and sae were ye punished for the sin of carin' for sic a woman."

Lauching in a wild frenzied way, wi' the tears rinnin' doon her cheeks, the puir woman feainted in his arms.

"For the Lord's sake, tak' her awa', Rob Skeoch," he said, "she'll gang mad if she's left langer here, and it'll drive me mad tae see what I hae doune—oh, mither, mither!"

And he hugged her tae him, greetin' owre her like a wean.

"Wha tauld ye aboot—the woman?" I said, as I placed Mrs. Lamond on the seat.

"Tam Marshall—that was what he took me up tae his lodgin' for. She was his wife, and Flora Bethune was her real name. He married her oot of a travelling circus, and a' his friends turned their backs on him.

He got intae difficulties, and whan he was at the warst the woman ran awa' frae him wi' an army officer. The shame and the anger drove him mad. He would hae killed them baith had he foun' them. Instead of fechtin' against his difficulties he gied way tae them ; he had lost heart, he said, and the drink didna mend it."

" He tauld ye a' that ? "

" Aye, and gied me proofs—letters, certificates, ae thing and anither that he has in the auld box in his garret."

" Did he say naething mair ? "

" Aye, he blamed me sair for deceivin' Bessie ; he cursed the woman wha had wrecked his life, and swore that if it was in his power she shouldna wrang Bessie Forsyth. I asked him tae dae naething till after I had spoken wi' her. He looked sae wild and desperate-like, that I was feart he would gang awa' and shame her—maybe strike her—that vera nicht. I gaed straicht tae her, and received frae her ain lips con-

firmation of all he had tauld me. It was fear that he might try to harm her that gart me ask ye tae let me bide in the house all nicht, mair nor the sickness that cam owre me."

The whole truth came on me like lichtnin'. But without sayin' onything I carried Mrs. Forsyth awa', and wi' the help of the officials she was sune brocht tae. I took her then tae a friend's house, and left her there, tellin' her there was hope that naebody expected. Syne I ran tae the Fiscal, and learnt that he had jist sent tae seek me. He was satisfied somebody had quitted the house by the window, and that whaever it was had lost the tap of the rauzor case in drappin' doon. I asked him to gie me the tap of the case, and tae come wi' me and bring twa officers.

We gaed straicht tae that ramshackle of a house opposite the Howf, whase mysteries I had often wonnert aboot, no thinkin' that the key tae ane of the greatest I had ever

kent was to be found there. We gaed cannily up the stair tae the door of Tam Marshall's garret. I hadna seen Tam since Hogmanay nicht, when I had left him in the lobby wi' David ; but I had been ower muckle fashed tae notice that, till Mrs. Saunders spoke tae me. Then, mindin' the crazy way he spoke to me about Bessie that nicht I was kennellin' the fire for him, and the rauzor on the mantelpiece, I had a suspicion that the rauzor micht hae cam' frae this garret. But that hadna gien me muckle hope for David, as he had been up there that nicht, and micht hae brocht it awa wi' him. There was nae need to speculate noo, hoosever, for here we were on the threshold o' the proof.

The Fiscal and his twa men planted themselves on the stair, ready tae burst intae the room. I chappit at the door. Nae answer, and there was still nae answer when I had chappit three or four times. I fancied I heard some ane breathing quick. Neither

the door nor the lock were strong, sae I jist planted my back against it and birzed it open. The stench that rushed out was enuch to knock ane doon. I heard a low chucklin' soun', like somebody lauchin' low. I glanced ower tae the far corner whar the soun' cam frae, and saw nae Tam Marshall, but the ghastly skeleton of a jabberin' idiot, hirstled doon on his haunches, his knees drawn up till his chin rested on them, his han's clasped roun' his ankles, and his een like twa sparks of fire glintin' on me. There was bluid on his han's, and on his face and breast. Idiot as he was, he kent me.

"Eh, Rab Skeoch, ye're a gude sowl," he cried in a feeble voice, but wi' that low chucklin' soun', and grinnin' like a baboon, "ye hae cam nae doot wi' a wee gill. Come on, Rab, jist a wee drap, man! What are ye glowerin' at? Oo aye, ye see I hae been in a habble wi' the neebors; ye ken by thir marks. Whist, lad, can ye keep a secret?"

He looked at me wi' a cunnin' meanin'

in his een. I couldna see the rauzor nor the case onywhar.

“Aweel, aweel, I’ll tell ye. She spoilt my life, and she would hae spoilt bonnie Bessie’s life tae; but I put and en’ tae that—I cut her throat, the——”

And he let aff a string of blasphemies, waur nor the warst randan of the Briggate could hae uttered.

The Fiscal and his men cam in at that, and as sune as he saw them he gied a hoarse skriech, like a water-hen, and made a spring at the skylicht, as if wi’ the notion of gettin’ out on the roof—maybe tae throw himsel’ doon tae the grun’; but the twa officers grippit him, and as the creatur’ hadna tasted meat or drink since Hogmanay nicht, he was weak as water in their han’s.

In the pouch of his coat we foun’ the stump of the rauzor case, and on it was printed the name “Simmons, Sheffield,” the same as on the blade of the rauzor.

That settled a' doubt in the matter, and Tam, ravin' fearfu', was carried awa.

Out of his ravin's the Fiscal managed tae gather the facts of the case, wi' what help I was able tae gie him. After speakin' wi' Lamond on Hogmanay nicht, Tam had stappit the rauzor in his pouch an' slippit intae the Howf without being noticed by onybody. He gaed intae the smoking-room and put out the gas, and crawled aneath the sofa. When I gaed in wi' David, he had crawled out of the room, drawin' the door tae after him, and slippit cannily up the stair tae his wife's bedroom. Wi' a' the cunnin' and caution of daft folk, he had lain aneath the bed for a while after I had gaen up to my room, and that ye'll min' was about four in the mornin'. He kent that I was aye the last tae bed, and sae, after giein' time for me tae fa' soun' asleep, he crept out and did his horrid wark. Syne he had left the weapon on the bed, and made his escape by the sitting-room window.

But there his cunnin' ended. He crawled up tae his garret, locked the door, and hirstled doon in the corner, wi' nae thocht of gettin' ony far'er awa' frae the place. Indeed, he never showed ony sign that he thocht he had dune wrang. He aye spoke of the thing wi' that chuckling lauch, and swearin' at the woman for her treachery. In the auld kist he had in his room, amang his twa or three books we foun' letters enuch tae prove hoo cruelly the woman had forsaken him in his sairest need. He was tried, and sent tae the criminal lunatic asylum for life. Twa year after I heard that he had died lauchin' at the memory of his crime, and spak o't as if it had jist happened twa days afore. He cam' owre Bessie's name often, but he had forgotten everything and everybody else.

As for David Lamond, there was plenty of proof of his habit of walkin' in his sleep whenever he was by-or'nar affeckit during the day, and that was the cause of the queer

look aboot his een. So far as human understandin' could mak' it oot, his share in the bad work of that New Year's mornin' was nae mair than what his mither had jaloosed when he first tauld her aboot it. He didna pursue his studies for the kirk, but gaed tae Edinburgh and learnt tae be a doctor.

Tibbie couldna bear tae bide in the Howf ony langer, though she micht hae dune a better trade nor ever; and, as she got nervous, and didna like for a while after tae be left alane nicht nor day, we made a paction atween us, got married, sauld the Howf tae advantage, and settled doon in this oot of the way place, whar Tibbie was brocht up, and whar we ca'd the hoose aftir the auld bield in the Trongate, and hae been braw and bien ever sin' syne.

Bessie, puir lassie, her joy when she kent that David was innocent, was maist as bad for her as her sorrow; but she got owre't wunnerfu' quick after David cam' till her

here, and begged her forgiveness. Wi' a' his fauts he wasna a bad chiel'. Sae she thocht, onyway, and a year after he got his diploma, she e'en forgied and forgot, and tae prove it, married him ; and as he turned out a cleverer doctor than he was like tae hae been a minister, he's got owre muckle adae in his wauken hours tae gang stravagin' in his sleep.

DOMINIE BARCLAY.



DOMINIE BARCLAY.

I.

HE stood beside the big black board, on which were chalked various arithmetical sums. In one hand he held a long “pointer,” in the other the Book of Psalms, from which, with his shrill, cracked voice, he had just been singing, to the ringing chorus of fifty children, the afternoon song of thanks for the work of the day. He stood there whilst the children defiled out at the door: first, the girls, with their blue-checked cotton aprons, patchwork bags, and bare feet; next, the boys, in their tight-fitting suits of homely moleskin, and with their eager eyes fixed upon the open doorway as they approached it.



dominie methodically exchanged the
bare old-fashioned coat he wore
school room for one very little less
ure, and quite as old in fashion.
the same methodic movement he
his hat, grasped a large, knotted,
od walking-stick, and sallied forth,
his assistant to lock the door.

he passed down the long street of
illage, many poor folks' heads nodded
respectfully. Some he met—rough,
ntured, rubicund, whiskey-bibbing
rs—who saluted him heartily, and
tioned him as to the progress of their
es. The dominie's sallow face glowed
ly with pleasure as the simple folks
ked him for getting so much wisdom
o such hard heads. The doctor passed
with a nod that would have been
ndly, only it was so very patronizing.
n the minister passed him with a very
stant recognition.

He was used to all that, however, and

it gave him no pain now. Long ago, when his heart had still cherished aspirations, he had fretted beneath the doctor's patronage and the minister's coldness. Then, a strong spirit had resisted them; and the spirit had cherished a fierce resolution to stand above them by-and-by. Now, the by-and-by had come and past, and Anthony Barclay was only the village schoolmaster.

Things somehow had not gone right with him, although he strove very hard to turn them right. His father had been a simple weaver, who having succeeded in scraping five whole pounds together, had been inspired with the wild ambition to make his son a minister. He sent him to the village school, and the boy Anthony had taken to his books with natural relish. True, he was somewhat of a dreamer, fond of reading odd books which had nothing to do with his tasks, and was thereby accounted a dull boy; still the hearts of the old weaver and his wife warmed with

the expectation of seeing their “callant” in the pulpit. It was to them a glorious dream ; for they regarded the holy office as the highest to which man could attain.

They were sometimes almost frightened by the greatness of their aspiration ; but they worked for it night and day, pinched and starved themselves, and almost neglected their second child, a daughter. By-and-by the time came when Anthony should have gone to St. Andrew’s or to Aberdeen ; and just at that time the old weaver died. Pale-faced Anthony looked wistfully down upon the grave ; and looked up again with little hope in his heart of ever being able to realize the dream for which the old man had fought so hard.

There was a weak, broken-down old mother, and a bright-eyed, somewhat giddy sister to supply with bread ; and he turned to the struggle bravely. He fought well—he fought with all his might ; for his whole soul and his reverence for the memory of

his father were in the conflict. But things did not go right with him. He had a fault, as all men have who fail. He was keenly sensitive to all that men said or thought about him. He liked to take his book and dream ; and he saw men with scarcely half his knowledge or power daily passing him, and leaving him far behind. He could not elbow his way as they did, or rise upon the shoulders of his fellows ; and so, when he obtained the charge of the Fashie school, he had received all the favour Fortune was likely to bestow.

Still he might have done much more than he had done, only circumstance was against him. His mother passed to her place beside his father, his sister went away he did not know whither, but he believed that there was shame upon her wherever she went. When he gave up the struggle, he sought relief in a narrow, stern faith, and tried to learn the bitter lesson of endurance.

He proceeded in his slow methodic way

down the village, with the sharp January wind biting through his thin clothing. He did not appear to take any note of the weather till he had reached the red-tiled cottage of Mrs. Pearson, where he lodged, and then to the smart pretty girl who opened the door for him—

“ It’s a cold day, Mysie ; I think we’ll have snow before night.”

Mysie was blushing, and appeared to be slightly confused. With a queer look over the dominie’s shoulder, she answered—

“ Do ye think that ? ”

“ I’m thinking it will. Is your mother come back from Dumloch ? ” (the market-town ten miles off).

“ No, she has nae come yet.”

By this time the dominie had entered the small low-roofed little parlour, and had laid down his hat and stick behind the door. Turning, he perceived a young man standing on the hearth. He was a good-looking fellow, with sandy whiskers, and frank,

honest face. He appeared to partake somewhat of Mysie's confusion, although he clasped his hands behind his back, and tried to seem at ease.

"Mister Fairlie!" said the dominie, opening his eyes a little, and knitting his brows a little.

"Yes, it's me," said the man, hastily; "I came over to see how you were getting on, and I brought you an old copy of Buchanan's '*Somnium*,' and '*Palinodia*.' I thought you would like to see them, and—in fact, that's why I am here."

"Ye are very kind, sir," said the dominie, drily; "but ye would have found me at the school-house sooner than here."

"Yes, of course; but, you know, I wanted to have a chat with you, and I didn't care about shivering in the school-room till you were ready. But you see I thought you would like the book;—and, in fact, that's why I am here."

Whilst he spoke, Mr. Fairlie unfolded a

newspaper parcel, and produced a mouldy parchment volume. The eyes of the old scholar glistened with eagerness ; but he did not raise his hand or touch the book.

“ It’s very kind of ye, Mr. Fairlie, in your position, to take notice of one in mine ; but——”

“ Stop there, dominie ; you know there’s nobody else about cares for these sort of things, and so I come to you.”

“ That’s a great compliment, Mr. Fairlie, though, maybe, a bit back-handed. I was about to say that I would rather not be entrusted with this book ; but since ye have brought it all this way for me, I’ll just take a look at it.”

He stretched forth his bony hand, and took up the volume almost reverently. He examined the binding carefully, as if suspicious of some fraud, the while he commented in his dry way. He began to turn over the pages slowly—a passage caught his attention—his comment ceased, and

he became absorbed in deciphering the poem.

He became so deeply absorbed that he forgot the presence of his young friends, and heard nothing of the busy whispers passing between them. The short winter day was rapidly darkening ; the dominie clasping the book with a sort of subdued rapture, strained his eyes to catch the words, which were running into one another, and forming a black square with a yellow border as the daylight faded.

Mysie stealthily placed a candle beside him, and drew the plain, cotton blind. He observed the change only by a jerk of his head back from the page he was perusing intently.

When she had drawn the blinds, the girl returned to a seat by the fire, and the whispering was continued. Thus a couple of hours, and Mr. Fairlie, whose conversation had evidently been a pleasanter one than he might have had with Anthony,

rose to depart. The dominie was apparently in a hurry to return to the "Somnium," but he bade his friend good-night respectfully. (Mr. Fairlie was the second son of a small proprietor in the neighbourhood, and it behoved the dominie to be respectful.) Mysie escorted the visitor to the door, whereupon followed more whispering, and then the door was closed.

Mysie re-entered the cosy little chamber, with very rosy cheeks and very bright eyes. She seated herself, produced a half-finished stocking from a drawer, and began to knit industriously, thinking happy thoughts, for she smiled as she worked, glancing now and again into the fire.

She did not observe that the dominie had raised his head, and had been regarding her for a long time with a queer, sad, inquiring look; he seemed to be trying to divine something in her face which puzzled him.

"Mysie, lass," he said, presently, resting his hand kindly upon her soft, yellow hair,

and causing her to look up with her big brown eyes full of amaze; “Mysie, lass, I’m thinking Mr. Fairlie came on another errand besides that of bringing me the book.”

“He came——” stammered the girl.

The dominie, patting her head with strange gentleness, interrupted her—

“Ay, ay, lassie; ye would say that he maybe had some other errand in the village. Maybe he had. But just ye hearken a minute till I tell ye something that happened no so very many years ago. It was a friend of mine, a lass maybe a year or two older than ye are, Mysie; and she was bonny as ye are, or nearly. Somebody, who might be just like Mr. Fairlie, used to see her without the knowledge of her mother or her brother”—the cracked voice faltered here—“she kept the acquaintance secret, and at last she went away with somebody. She did not go as his wife, mind ye, and I’m thinking she was sorry for it after.”

Mysie Pearson's face had lost all colour ; her lips trembled, and suddenly she burst into tears. The simple-hearted dominie looked about him in dire distress ; he had not suspected that his words would have had such an effect as this.

"Whist, whist, Mysie !" he said, pleadingly ; "I'm an old man—at least, I have been made old by bitter suffering, and I just wanted to speak a word of warning. I would not dare to think— There, Mysie, I would cut out my tongue rather than cause ye pain."

The latter words were spoken with a sudden fervour which might have become a lover, and the face of the old man was overspread with a glow of passionate tenderness. But, some sudden memory brought back the wrinkles, and the quiet, dreamy expression, the moment after. When Mysie looked up tearfully, she saw nothing more in his gaze than the anxiety of a good friend for her safety.

II.

A knock at the outer door prevented further conversation. Hastily wiping her eyes and pushing back her hair, Mysie answered the summons. When she raised the latch, a great gust of wind blew the door open and ran whistling through the passage. Then Mysie advanced a step, and soft, white snow-flakes fell upon her face.

There was a black shadow across the doorway, and Mysie presently discovered that it was a man on horseback.

“This is where the schoolmaster bides, my lass, is it no ?” said the gruff voice of the horseman.

“Yes, sir.”

"I was passing the cottar houses at Gaskin, and a woman asked me to bring this scrap of paper to him. Here, take it."

"Thank ye, sir."

"All right, my lass. Good-night."

And he rode away at a smart pace up the village.

It was only a scrap of paper he had given to Mysie, and there was very little written upon it. But that little operated strangely upon the dominie. He sat staring at the paper for some minutes after he had read it; his mouth was open and his thin lips were twitching nervously. The expression of his face was indicative of a deep inner suffering.

He rose abruptly from his seat.

"My hat, Mysie, and my staff," he said, huskily. "I'm going out."

"Out!" exclaimed the girl—"going out on such a night as this? Do you no hear the wind how it's soughing? and it's snowing heavy, as ye said it would."

"I canna help that, my lass ; I mun go, I mun go," he said, in his agitation returning to the broad Doric.

He had approached the door, and had himself taken down his hat and grasped his stick. Mysie, seeing that something unusual had occurred, did not attempt further to stay him. She procured the thick woollen muffler, and fastened it round his neck.

Then he passed out, with lips tightly clenched, and a hard, stern resolution expressed upon his sharp features. His feet sunk deep in the snow as he strode steadily Gaskinwards. The wind caught up the square tails of his coat, and made them flutter about his thin, gaunt limbs. But he held steadily onward, for he knew the road well, and, despite the darkness, he was sure of his way. He did not seem to heed the keen blast of the winter night, which howled and whined its mournful discord around him as he stalked on. He did

not seem to heed the thick flakes of snow, which continued to fall steadily. All thought, all sense, seemed to be absorbed in the desire to reach Gaskin with his best speed. The very few words which had been written upon that scrap of paper had kindled a fire within him which defied the coldness of the night. They kept singing in his brain until the very wind seemed to catch them up and rush along with them, noising them about, urging him to haste.

"I am dying, Anthony; come to me at Gaskin cottar houses.—ELSPIE."

That was what the scrap of paper had said, and that was what the wind was moaning and shrieking in the dominie's ears.

With all his speed, he took nearly two hours to get over the five miles between Fashie and Gaskin. When he saw the fire-lights of the cottar houses glowing upon their small square windows he paused,

leaning upon his staff heavily, and pressing his hand upon his brow, as if to collect his thoughts. They were bitter thoughts, and from beneath his worn hands, down his sunken cheeks, burning tears stole slowly.

He was aroused by a strange sound near him. It was like a moan—not of the wind this time, but of some human voice. He drew the sleeve of his coat across his eyes—then listened. Only a minute—the moan was repeated. It formed into words, and he heard his own name pronounced faintly.

“Anthony, Anthony.”

He peered through the dim light, but saw nothing. He advanced to the low, roughly built, stone dyke, and listened again. He heard some animal sniffing around him, and presently he felt a dog’s paws upon his leg. He bent down, and managed to discover that the dog was a shepherd’s colley. The animal whined strangely, and immediately bounded away. The dominie advanced

cautiously by the side of the dyke till he was stopped again by the dog.

Huddled close to the wall, as if seeking what poor shelter the loose stones could yield, was a woman clasping a sleeping child to her breast, and moaning feebly. Sickness and fatigue had almost reached their limit, and the Great Physician was standing by. The woman's mind wandered, and between her feeble moans she uttered sad words of bitter repentance. And all the time the wind went southing and murmuring along, tossing the snow-flakes in a wild dance before it.

The dominie, without speaking, seated himself upon a large stone beside the woman, and resting his elbows upon his knees, and covering his face with his hands, listened to her pitiful words.

"He left me—left me to starve and die, Anthony. . . . I have come to you—to you for pity, for pardon. . . . I'm dying, Anthony. I couldna wait—I couldna eat, till

—till I had seen you for my bairn's sake.
. . . Ye will pity me, Anthony, for I'm—
dying."

"Ay, Elspie, ay, I pity you," faltered the dominie, hoarsely.

The woman, shivering with cold, opened her eyes slowly, and peered at the man.

"Is it you, Anthony?" she said, faintly. She did not seem to be much surprised by his presence: the despair which was impressed upon her haggard face had deadened the sensibility that would have made her tremble and weep when he approached her.

"Ay, it's me."

"And ye pity me . . . ye have a kind heart, Anthony—and ye pity—but ye canna pardon? . . . no, and I canna ask ye——"

"But there's one above that ye can ask, Elspie—ask Him."

"No, no, no! He canna care for a poor creature like me, dying here ahint a dyke."

"Whist, woman, whist! ye are speaking blasphemy, even when the hand of death is

on ye," he interrupted, sternly. "I can pity, I can forgive, but He can do far more. Pray, Elspie, pray."

"But it's no use. . . . It's no mysel' I'm thinking about, it's my bairn—my poor bairn, Anthony, that is like to die with me. . . . She's sae cold, sae cold, and sae friendless."

The woman tightened her arms around her sleeping child, sobbing more bitterly than before.

"Sae friendless, sae friendless," she moaned; "and will be motherless. My poor bairn, my poor helpless bairn!"

The dominie found difficulty in speaking, for there was something sticking in his throat and choking his utterance.

"Take ye no heed to the bairn, Elspie; I will mind her."

"Will ye do that? will ye do that, Anthony? . . . Ye have a kind heart—I would have asked ye to do that—but I daredna."

“ Ay, I will do it, if her father will not take her from me.”

“ Dinna fear that . . . he left me and my bairn to starve—he left us to die . . . oh, I have been punished, Anthony, sorely punished. But ye will mind her ? ”

“ Ay, poor thing, I will mind her.”

“ Ye will find in this bag that I have fastened round her neck a bit letter—ye will find in the letter her father’s name, but—— ”

Her voice failed, and her head sank back.

“ Speak on, Elspie,” said the dominie, bending over her, and taking one of her cold, clammy hands between his own.

“ But ye will no tell the folks about that—that it’s my bairn . . . ye will no tell them how I died out in the snow ? ”

The dominie shook his head sadly.

“ Ay, ay, woman ; it’s no God we fear, it’s our neighbours.”

“ But ye will promise, Anthony—ye will promise ? ” she pleaded, with a last effort to raise herself.

"As ye will, Elspie—I promise."

She heard the promise, and a faint pressure of his hand indicated that she understood. That was all, for the Great Physician had relieved the sorrowing one of all earthly pain. Anthony Barclay felt the fingers of the hand he held grow cold and stiff. He laid it by the dead woman's side, and, bending forward, gently closed the eyelids over the glassy eyes, then reverently doffed his hat and prayed—prayed for strength to protect the child, and for the strength which would enable him to forgive the man who had sinned so cruelly against this woman.

When he rose to his feet he wore a calm, settled expression. There was no regret, no pain. His religion had taught him that death was terrible and irremediable; but that it was as unholy to lament for the dead as to seek to join them. His philosophy had taught him that it was useless to lament the irremediable, and that death was the one panacea for the many ills of life.

With the tenderness of a mother handling her firstborn, he lifted the sleeping child in his arms, and, with her little head resting upon his shoulder, he hastened towards the cottar houses. The wind raised his scanty hair, and made his coat flutter and flap about him, the while thick flakes of snow fell softly upon him. The colley, which had remained shivering near him all this time, now bounded on before, occasionally pausing to look up inquiringly into the old man's face. It seemed almost to have a human consciousness of the great misery which had been hovering about the man's life, and had at last fallen upon him, and marked that cold, pitiless expression upon the outer man, the while the uprising of the heart—the tenderness that would have overflowed in tears—was crushed back to its recess of his nature with the unpitying verdict, “She has sinned—she has been punished. God's will be done !”

The dog had bounded on before him, and,

by a series of vigorous howls and scratches, had caused his master, the "cattleman" of Gaskin Farm, to open the door.

"Eh, Jess, whar hae ye been roving till?" demanded he, in a gruff tone, but with a welcoming manner, addressing his dog.

The animal would not enter, but stood on the doorstep, looking down the road. The cottar's wonder at the dog's conduct was answered by the appearance of the dominie carrying the child.

"A woman has died in the snow," he said, hollowly, "and this is her bairn. I want help for both."

III.

THERE was a great ado in Fashie, and that is equivalent to saying that there was a prime piece of scandal afloat. The members of the Bogie Kirk were quite shocked, and the elders were troubled to the very depths of their souls. The "unco gude" were up in arms, terrified for the sanctity of their establishment, and alarmed for the purity of their bairns' minds.

The storm waxed loud and furious, and the brunt of it all fell upon the head of Dominie Barclay, who for twenty-four years had laboured with the calm earnestness of a man who had resolved to do well that which he had set his hand to do—who had

laboured for twenty-four years, despite every impulse and yearning of his nature, to instil the rudiments of Latin grammar, and plain geometry into the very hard heads of his pupils—laboured, too, with many wants and very poor pay.

But what had the “unco gude” of Bogie Kirk to do with that? Whenever they did do anything wrong they were careful to do it in the dark. But here had he, with the most extraordinarily barefaced impudence, brought home a child, a girl of some four or five years, who certainly was his own, although he denied that accusation with a boldness commensurate with his impudence in bringing her to Fashie at all. The worst of it was that he actually introduced the girl to the school, to the manifest danger of all the hopeful offspring therein.

The elders of the kirk, in solemn conclave assembled, had the culprit up before them. Quietly, but with those hard lines of his face drawn into a very firm and

resolute expression, he denied that the child was his, although he was her natural guardian in the absence of any nearer friend. He admitted that he had paid for the burial of a woman in the cemetery of Dumloch ; but who the woman was he refused to reveal. The elders shook their heads and thought all this reticence very suspicious ; not only very suspicious but very bad ; and not only very bad, but a direct proof of guilt.

The dominie bowed his head to their decision and went away. He was turned out of his school, and a younger and more active man took his place. But the dominie would not speak. There was a queer sort of pride in the man's nature, arising from the faith which had taught him to believe that the chosen ones of the Lord were made to endure much suffering. So with this pride in his heart—the evil of which he could not see—he bowed his head and turned away, observing with all needful

strictness the letter of his promise to the dead Elspie.

When he reached his home that day the little Elspie was watching for him at the cottage door. Clapping her little hands, and with her bright violet eyes sparkling and glancing with joy, she ran to meet him when she saw him approaching. She clasped his long bony hand gleefully, and swung by it, and hopped and skipped by his side as he advanced to the cottage.

Then, when he was in the little parlour, the man's heart yearned toward the little one, and he took her up in his arms and placed her upon his knee, looking into her chubby face dreamily.

“Ay, ay, Elspie, my lamb, ye have cost me dear—ye have cost me dear!”

“Elspie love you,” pouted the child, making a great dive at his neck with her little hands.

He hugged her to his breast fondly, eagerly, and his heavy eyes brightened.

"Ay, my bonny lamb, ye love me, and I wouldna part with ye if they were to give me the school back again a dozen times. I wouldna, shallna part with ye."

That was how the dominie reconciled himself to the loss of his school. But after all, the loss was not so very great, for when he took the house at the corner of the village street, and, in defiance of the elders of Bogie Kirk, set up a school on his own account, many of his old pupils were sent to him, and many new ones accompanied them. Thus the important question as to his income was settled satisfactorily, and at the end of the year he found that he had earned the large sum of fifty pounds sterling. This was only ten pounds less than the sum which for twenty-four years he had been receiving annually from his old school.

He was satisfied with his success, for a very small moiety of Fortune's favours was enough for him. He would even have been elated, had it been possible for his dreamy

nature to exult in such a purely mundane matter.

All this time little Elspie had been tended by pretty Mysie Pearson, who, with her mother, had taken a liking to the child from the first. Mysie's liking had grown into something more—it had become an earnest affection, although Mr. Fairlie continued, at intervals, to visit the cottage, under the pretence of bringing rare books to the dominie, and Mysie continued to blush and brighten at his visits.

Then there was another great ado in Fashie, which was again equivalent to saying that a prime piece of scandal was afloat. This time it was Mysie Pearson who had to bear the brunt, and with her name was associated that of Frank Fairlie, of the Haugh. The dominie had, in some fit of eccentricity, forbidden Mr. Fairlie to visit him again. Mr. Fairlie's visits had not thereupon ceased, although Anthony would not see him, or, when by accident they did

meet, would pass him sternly by without speaking.

They were cruel words that were spoken about poor Mysie, and she was soon acquainted with their nature. Then she rarely crossed the doorstep, and could not be persuaded by her anxious mother to go into the village on any account. This seclusion soon robbed her cheeks of their bloom, and her eyes of their brightness; still those cruel words were passed about, and at last they came even to the dreamy dominie's comprehension.

He was in his schoolroom when he heard them, or rather when their meaning first occurred to him, and he stood quite motionless, with all his pupils gaping and gazing at him wonderingly.

With an alertness of movement that he had not displayed since the night of the snowstorm, he dismissed his pupils, changed his coat, and, staff in hand, passed down to the cottage. Little Elpsie had gone before

him, and he now found her romping with Mysie, who displayed unusually bright eyes and flushed cheeks.

Just as he had done a year ago, the dominie placed his hand on Mysie's head, but this time there was something tremulous in his manner and his voice.

"Mysie, lass," he began, hesitatingly, "what would you do if you were to lose Elspie there?"

"Lose Elspie!" cried Mysie.

"Ay, it's possible."

"No, no, it is no possible, for I couldna bear it."

"Ay, but it is possible, Mysie, whether ye could bear it or no; unless——" And here the dominie looked around him wanderingly, and made a weak effort to clear his throat of some impediment to his speech—"unless ye will consent to make it impossible."

Mysie drew herself up, and throwing back her hair, looked at the dominie curiously.

“ How can I make it impossible ? ”

The dominie again looked around him wanderingly, and made another faint effort to clear his throat.

“ I dinna know how to put it to you right, Mysie,” he said, hesitatingly, “ because I am sae old, and ye are sae young and bonny.”

With a frank smile she placed her hand confidingly in his.

“ Speak what you will ; I know it will come frae a kind heart.”

The dominie abstractedly retained her hand.

“ Ye think that ? Then ye’ll no heed what I say, supposing it should give ye some pain at first ? ”

“ I know who speaks.”

“ I’m just like a doctor who cuts off a leg or an arm to save the body. I have known ye since ye were a bairn, Mysie, and I have always been fond of ye, and I think I have grown fonder as ye and myself grow older.

Ye have been a good lass, and I couldna help being fond of you."

"I'm glad ye have thought that."

"But that is no what I was going to say. I was going to tell ye how ye might make it impossible to lose Elspie there."

"Ay, tell me that," said the girl, looking towards the child tenderly.

"There is only one way, and I wouldna propose that way if it were not that folk have been talking—talking sae much about ye and Mr. Fairlie."

The girl's face reddened.

"I dinna care what folks say about me and Mr. Fairlie," she said, somewhat petulantly.

"Ay, but wait a minute, Mysie. Ye must heed what they say, for it concerns your honest name," pursued the dominie, earnestly. "Folk tell lies about their neighbours, as I have cause to know. But the lies do just as much harm as if they were truth, hereabout. I want to prove to

them all that they are telling lies, and that is why—for your sake and for Elspie's sake—I want ye to be my wife."

Mysie looked at him for a minute in mute amaze; then, with a sudden outburst of passion—

"I will prove to them myself that they are telling lies, for I have promised to be Mr. Fairlie's wife in a fortnight from the morn."

Anthony Barclay's hands fell to his sides, and he looked at her dumbly, helplessly, till her passion was extinguished in her pity for him.

"Have ye promised that, Mysie?" he inquired, hoarsely.

"Ay, and we will be married here in a fortnight, if we both live."

The dominie gave vent to a low moan, clasping his hands and letting his chin fall upon his breast.

"He will no marry ye, Mysie—he will no marry ye."

"And what for no?" she demanded, with a proud toss of the head.

"Because he is no an honest man; because he has been deceiving ye, as ye will learn by-and-by, when it is too late, as others have done before ye."

"Ye have no right to say that, for ye have never known him deceive onybody."

"I have Mysie—I have."

"Tell me who, then?"

The dominie's mouth opened as if he were about to answer as she desired, but he seemed to remember something, and said, sadly—

"I canna tell ye."

"Then I'll no believe ye," she said, firmly, and marched out of the room.

That was the only bit of romance which had ever got mixed up with the dominie's mathematics. He turned to the child Elspie, who had been watching him with a queer expression, as if she did not know whether to cry or laugh, and taking her up

in his arms he kissed her, and found his consolation in her simple nature.

It was true, and all Fashie was disturbed by the tidings. Despite the sneers of his friends, and the protestations of his relations, Frank Fairlie was about to marry the humble cottager's daughter, Mysie Pearson. He did marry her, too ; and Anthony Barclay, with his sharp stony face and kindly heart, gave away the bride. By this it must not appear that he had accused Mr. Fairlie wilfully of being dishonest. His accusation was the result of a misapprehension arising from the letter which he had received from his sister on the night of her sad death. The letter had been signed “F. Fairlie ;” and the dominie, believing that he recognized Frank's penmanship, and from various observations made afterwards, attributed to him his sister's disgrace.

The day after Mysie had told him of her engagement, Anthony sought Mr. Fairlie,

and, on making his grievous accusation, learned the truth. Frederick, the elder brother of Frank, and who had died only a few months previously in a miserable condition abroad, was the real culprit.

So Mysie was married, and the dominie sadly watched the carriage as it bore away the one gleam of romance in his life. Then he turned to little Elspie, and for her sake he worked his work, trying still to learn the hard lesson of endurance and of envying no man.



A PACTION WI' THE DEIL.

A PACTION WI' THE DEIL.

My man, Donald Macpherson, is shust as sober as anypody whan he canna get ouskie; but syne he's shust as canker't a carle as leeves. So I would shust as shune hae him trunk as sober; for though it's ill doing wi' him whan's trunk, tere's no doing wi' him at all when's sober. He was born neist door to a still, an' I'll thocht the folk gie him ouskie to trink 'stead o' milk or water, and that's what for he never could took water wi'out a cinner intill't, no peing accustomed wi' sic stuff.

He was ay dour, an' had an unco opinion o' himsel'; an' whan he wanted to go ae gate, you could no more took him anither than you could took a clocken hen frae

her eggs. An' he was ay trunk, barring the occasions mentioned. He was trunk when we married, an' he was trunk—Guid forgie him!—when's mither was puried, poor woman, so that he was maist puried himsel' wi' trying to gie her a partin' tram an' tum'lin' into the pit. His nose was bludet whan they bigget him oot; put he shust glowered at the neck o' the pottle he'd kept in his han' an' says dourly—

"Cot tam, she nicht hae left her a trap to wat her lips after ta shourney. Put she was ay kreedy."

Donald's folk an' my folk was all fishers. They was all fond o' the ouskie, so that one py one they was all droon't, and Donald was left wi' a poat to himsel'. Whan that cam' about Donald an' me wi' the poat emigrated to Kourock. We got on prawlys for a while; Donald he'll catch the fish, and I'll sell her in Greenock. But ae stormy nicht, shust twalmonths syne noo, whan the New Year had tappit his ouskie

barrels an' alloo'd the trink to rin like a sheuch on a rainy day, Donald he'll come home to me wi' his clo'es all torn an' dreepin' wi' water—

"Och, Kirsty," he says, "she'll pe troon't."

"You canna be droon't," quo' I, "when you're standing there."

"Oich ay, put she'll be troon't for a' tat," he says. "Ta teevil got intill ta poat, an' he'll trive her a' to smash."

The meaning was that he'd rin the poat ashore, an' she got a' proken to pits. We had to get her mendit, an' while she was mendin', Donald would do nothing at all; an' as I had no fish to sauld, we had nothing to eat. Hoo Donald got trunk I canna tell; put it ay seems that a man can get ouskie whan he canna get meat. So Donald, he'll smoke an' pe trunk, an' he'll sit in the corner an' tam the teevil for preaking his poat.

But whan the poat was mendit, the man

wouldna trust Donald, and wouldna gie him the poat till she was paid for.

"The teevil tak' you for a lazy sot," quo' I, "we'll pe all starved to deed, and syne we'll see what you'll say."

"Oich, she wouldna care if ta teevil tid tak' her," says he, scartin' his pow, "if she'll only shust pay for her poat. Put she'll go to her cousins in Kreenock an' porrow ta siller."

That was shust Hogmanay, and I'll thocht that his cousins, wha was only two or three time remove, would lend him the siller when they knowed we was in sic a happle. Pefore he'll go away I'll spoke to him my mind.

"Noo, Donald," I says, "we hae peen married four year or more, an' in all that time you was ay getting trunk an' trunker. Mony a day we had to go to ped wi'out our supper or dinner because you'll trunk the siller."

"You're spokin' a lee, Kirsty Macpher-

son," quo' he, "she'll never trunk noch put ouskie, and she'll no try to trunk siller, for she'd lie hard in her pooels tat was no meant for a pank."

"Ye'll knew what I mean, Donald; that you spend all the siller on trink, trink, trink—"

He stops me again wi' ane o' his dogged looks, an' he says, shust as if there was no harm—

"An' tat's three trinks all at once, and she wouldna took more nor ane at a time for nentanyl. Put what for was ta siller made put to get ouskie?"

"To get coot clo'es for the kirk, Donald Macpherson, an' coot meat for the belly, and to lay py for proken leg."

"Oo, ay," said Donald, twisting his shouthers, "put she would rather hae ta ouskie than ta proken leg."

"You loss your prether an' your father, Donald, pecause you'll pe trunk, an' if you go on muckle more you'll loss your wife—"

Donald loup frae his stool.

"Oich, woman, if she'll thocht that she'll go an' pe trunk for ever——"

He spoke it so dryly that I thocht he meant it. Put I did no loss my temper, and I say to him——

"Well, Donald, I will make no words on the subject more at present, put if you'll go to Greenock to-day, an' if you'll get the siller an' syne get trunk wi't, ther'll be no paying the poat—that's all."

"Tid you'll think she was a drunken sot tat couldna pass a public-house ?" he says, puttin' his cutty intil his pouch, and lookin' as though I had plamed him for a faut he never committed. "You'll see tat she can come hame soper, for she'll no took more nor a tram or twa wi' her cousins, shust to wish them a coot New Year, and to show there's no ill will ; an' maype she'll took a tram or twa wi' her frien's, an' a tram or twa wi' her neepors, put she'll took no more."

Donald gaed awa, an' I was pusy sortin' up the house. It was a cold day, an' we was in sic pad luck that I could not pe so merry as in the old times at home in the Highlands. Put I shust thocht that maype the morn's morn that would bring a New Year micht bring coot luck to Donald an' me.

At nicht, whan the house was clean as a fresh haddy, I looked out at the door for Donald. Put the nicht was vera dark, and Donald was not come. I went ower to a neepor to spoke wi' her for a while, an' she gied me a dram that was vera cheerin' to me at that time, for I was lossin' heart altogether, seein' that Donald was not come yet, an' that I was thinkin' he was trunk again, an' spent or lossed the siller, or maybe was robbed.

My neepor knew that I was in distress aboot my man, an' she gied me another dram ; an' syne whan twal o'clock cam', it brocht some praw lads to first-foot my

neepor, an' they gied us another dram. The lads were singin' an' crackin' an' dancin', an' the old piper, Roy, played a spring that made me thocht I was pack in the Highlands again, whan ane o' the lads that had been at the door shouts to us to come an' see what we should see.

So we gaed to the door, an' there was a great pleeze in the sky, as though all Kreenock was in a lowe. The lads set aff to the toun to see what was the matter, an' I went pack to our ain house. Donald was not come yet.

I'll stood at the door for an hour or more watchin' the great pleeze in the sky, an' thinkin' that Satan was hettin' his shanks somewhar. Donald was not come yet.

I sat doun on a stool, wi' my pack at the wall, after puttin' twa or three pranches o' stick I had gathered mysel', on the fire. I was beginnin' to fall asleep, an' the sticks was beginnin' to pleeze, whan I hear a step on the road, an' oich! I'll know it was Donald, an' trunk again.

It was him, put whan he'll come in I hardly know him; his face was plack wi' soot, his preeks an' jacket was torn, an' there was a smell o' a singed sheep's head about him. Put what was most surprisin' of all, he was lookin' sober—only he was as skeared-like, as though he'd been slewin' somepody. He parred the door. Syne he wiped his proo, an' turned up the tail o' his jacket to look at it; an' syne he gaed birlin' roun' an' roun' like a peerie, trying to get a sicht at the pack pairt o' his preeks.

All this time he never spoke, an' I never spoke neither, for I'll begin to thocht that Donald was daft. Whan he couldna see the pairt o' his preeks he wanted to see, Donald stood like a post in the middle o' the floor an' glowert at me, scartin' his pow, as though he was sore pampoozled.

"What do you'll see, woman?" he says, an' he stopped clawin' his head.

"Deed, Donald, I shust see that you have gotten your face all coom, an' your

pest clo'es all torn, an' that you're no so trunk as I expeckit."

"Trunk!" he roars, furious, "she's soper as a shudges and pailies altogether."

That minute he started to ripe all his pockets, an' he brings oot from one a small row o' paper. He turned it over an' over in his han's; syne he smelt it; syne he put a corner into his mou' an' tasted it wi' his tongue; and syne he opened it oot on the table an' inspeckit it."

"Ane, twa, three, four, five," he says, lookin' more pampoozled than afore, "an' all coot notes o' the Commercial Pank."

I loup'd to my feet at that, an' grippit his arm, for the suspeecion cam' ower me that he robbit somepody.

"Donald," I says, "what hae you peen doin'?"

"Ane, twa, three, four, five," he says again, "an' all coot notes."

"Donald, O Donald," I cried, "what is the matter?"

"Ta teevil's ta matter, woman, an' tat's his notes."

I was frichted py that, an' I grippit his arm tichter, for I was feart that he'd peen murderin' somepody noo, as weel as robbin' him.

"What do you mean, Donald? Did no your cousins gie you the notes?"

"No. Tid you'll saw ta fire in ta sky?"

"Ay, ay. Put whar did you get the notes?"

"Tat fire was ta teil's ain. She was in Kreenock the nichte, an' I'll saw her an' she'll gie me the notes to say nocht apoot it?"

He gaed on countin' the notes an' glowerin' at them, an' would say no more to me till I got him a tram from our neebor's. Whan he got the ouskie he told me all about the matter.

Our cousins was a shentlemans, he says, wi' the notes on the table afore him, an' watchin' them as though he'll thocht they

micht flee awa, "an' whan she'll tell her tat she was wantin' five pounds, he'll gie us a tram and tell us she has no money at all, put she was fera sorry. Syne wee'l took anither tram, and go out to try an' fin' somepody tat had siller. Put noppody had siller, an' everypody gie us a tram, so tat when it was nicht she'll shust no care apoot ta five pounds, an' she'll pe think of going home. She was trunk a wee, she'll thocht, an' she was marchin' apoot ta toun all day so tat she was weariet, an' she'll sit doon on ta wooden trap door o' ta cellars o' a pig warehouse.

"She'll thocht it all ofer, an' she'll thocht it wus fera pat no to be aple to get ta poat, an' to hae Kirsty flytin' and thochtin' she was spent all ta sillers. She'll wush she could got ta siller if it wus from ta teil hersel', an' shust at tat minute tere was a fluff o' reek cam' up aroun' her an' she'll thocht it cam frae ta cellar. Syne she'll fint ta hatch movin'

wi' somepody pelow trying to lift her up.
Syne ane half o' ta hatch opens up an'
there was anither fluff o' plack reek an'
ta shentlemans in plack she'll put her heid
up an' glower wi' twa een like palls o' fire.

"'Fat are you toin' tere?' she says wi'
a foice shakin' wi' anger.

"'Oich, oich, Donald,' she'll pe thocht
to hersel', 'it'll pe all ofer wi' her noo an'
she'll pe took doon ta plack hole ;' put
she'll roll ofer on her side an' say, 'She'll
pe do nothin' at all, your krace's teilship,
put shust restin'.'

"She'll knew how to spoke to ta shentle-
folks, for she'll hear ta funkeys spoke to
ta Tuke o' Argyle. Put ta teil he'll shust
lauch an' come up to ta grun', an' she'll
see ta fire purnin' an' smell ta primstone
doon in ta hole afore ta trap was closed.

"'Tid you'll know me?' she says,
glowerin' at her, an' speakin' in a fera
small foice an' fera quiet way for ta teil.

"'Oich, ay, Donald has heerd tell o' your

krace's honour afore noo, an' she pe respeck her fera muckle a great deal more noo she's had ta honour o' spokin' wi' her.'

" So wi' tat she wus tryin' to creep awa,
put ta teil he'll grip her py ta neck an
says—

" 'Pide a wee, Donald,' an' she'll spoke fera like an ord'nar pody, only her han's was shockin' an' hot, an' tere was ta smell o' primstone. 'Pide a wee, Donald, I'll want to make a paction wi' you.'

" 'She's fera muckle honour't your krace's honor, put she'll no daur do tat.'

" 'Pide till you'll knew what it was,' says ta shentlemans, in a fera frien'ly way. 'Fat proch't you here ?'

" 'Oich, she'll shust come to see her cousins an' to porrow a taet siller for her needcessities.'

" ' You're in tifficklety, syne ? ' says ta teil, quietly.

" 'Ay, she was pothered to pay her poat—
did you no knew ? '

"An' she was shooking all ta while she was spokin' wi' her as though she'd been an old frent.

"'Ou ay, she'll know, put she likes to speer. Hoo muckle siller did you'll want, Donald?'

"'Five pounds, your krace, put she'll no pother you——'

"'Haud your jaw, Donald, an' answer me,' says ta teil, giein' me a jerk that procht her on to ta trap again, an' she'll thocht she was shust goin' doon; put she wonnering fat for ta teil was lookin' apoot him as though he was frichted somepody was coming. 'Noo, Donald, we'll mak' a paction. If you'll nefer tell nopoly you hae seen me' I'll gie you ta five pounds an' nefer ask it pack again. Did you'll agree?'

"'Is tat all your krace wants, shust nefer to spoke?'

"'Tat's all. Pe quick, for I'm in a hurry. You'll agree?'

"'To be sure,' she says, trimlin' altogether, for ta teil was getting angry.

“‘Here’s ta five pounds. Swear you’ll nefer say you saw me.’

“‘Oich, she’ll swear tat as often as you please; put you’re choking her.’

“Ta teil had grippit her py ta throat, put she’ll let go noo.

“‘Shut your een, Donald, an’ pide tere for half an hour. If you’ll move beforo tat time she’ll come pack an’ purn you.’

“I steekit my een an’ I’ll pide wi’ ta notes in my han’ for a while, shust kee’in’ up noo an’ than to see if nopoly was tere. Ta teil was awa, put she’ll hae left ta reek an’ ta fire ahint, for tere was reek comin’ up an’ chokin’ her as she was sittin’, an’ all at ance she’ll fint ta seat fera hot, an’ she’ll smell her preeks purnin’; so she’ll shust loup up, an’ tere was a blade o’ flame loup up through the trap after her, an’ she’ll stap ta notes in her pouch an’ rin awa, an’ nefer stop till she’ll got home.”

“You hae peen trunk again, Donald, an’ dreamin’,” I says.

"Maype she'll thocht that hersel'," he says, "put tere's the notes an' here's my preeks purnt."

He turned apoot an' showed me the purns, and there was the notes afore me.

"Did you'll no get the notes frae your cousin?"

"No! did you'll thocht she would not know her cousins frae ta teil?"

There was no answer to that, an' so I was obleeged to go to ped wi' the notion that Donald had made a paction wi' the teil himself. I pegged Donald no to use the siller; put whan he saw them in proad daylight, and saw they were good notes, he said he would not throw awa "coot notes for nopody."

I promised Donald that I would never spoke aboot this awful thing to nopody; an' there was no need to promise, for I was in sae great a fricht that the gentleman would stap into our house some day an' took Donald wi' him, that I leeved in terror for a whole week.

Donald paid for the poat, and got her hame, an' we was going to do weel, though we had been helped by the teil, when one day there cam'twa policemen frae Kreenock, an' took Donald awa wi' him, charged wi' haein' some han' in the robbery of Maissers Murdochson, Farquhar, an' Co.'s, on Hogmanay nicht, on account of his haein' paid for his poat wi' some o' the notes that had been stolen.

"I'll know ta teil's siller would do us no good, Donald," I cried whan the policemen took him awa.

They took him afore the shudges an' pailies, an' I'll thocht they would hung and quarter him, for Donald was dour an' sober, and wouldna spoke a word. So I shust up an' told them the whole story, though Donald was praw an' angry wi' me for daein' it. Put the shudges an' pailies shust shook their powes, and sent Donald pack to the lock-up to wait for more evidence against him.

Donald was procht befor the shudges an' pailies again in a week, an' this time there was another man procht peside him. As sune as Donald saw him he near loupet ower the heads of the policemen, shoutin' out—

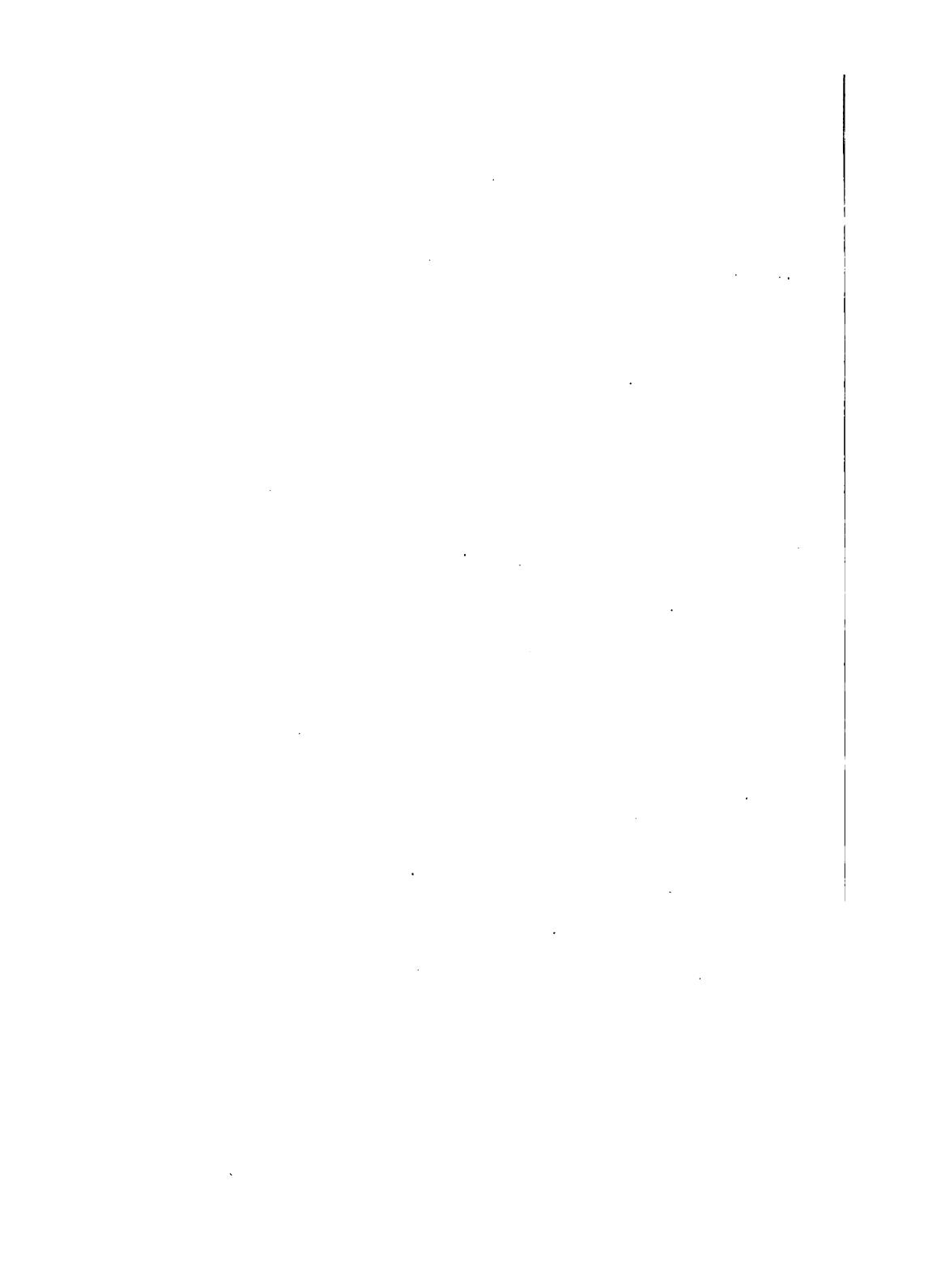
“ It's the teil himsel' ! ”

The teil, wha was a decent-looking gentleman, put vera muckle cast doon, made what was called a confession, an' Donald was set free. The teil was nae teil at all, put a clerk to Murdochson, Farquhar, an' Co. He had stolen a hunner pounds from his master's iron kist, an' had set fire to the place to hide what he had dune. He had got into the warehouse by the cellar hatch-door at the pack, an' had kendled the fire in the cellar. On coming oot he was frichtened by findin' Donald sittin' whar he was; put seein' that he was trunk, an' thocht he was the teil, he shust let him believe that, an' gied him the five pounds to say nocht aboot it.

The iron kist was rescued frae the fire, an' the robbery discovered. Syne the clerk, wha's name was George Fyfe, rins awa, an' the first o' the notes that was discovered was the anes Donald had paid for his poat. So Donald was procht up pefore the shudges an' pailies, an' was nearly pein' hangt or transported for pein' a robber.

Donald was sober for a week after that, put he's shust as trunk as often as ever noo, though he sweers he'll hae no more dealings wi' the teil ; an' we hae been gettin' on prawlies in the world since syne.

THE END.



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